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THEORIES AND PRACTICES IN THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN DURING THE AGE OF ENLIGHTMENT IN FRANCE.

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A REPORT WAS GIVEN ON A SEARCH OF THE LITERATURE ON THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN FRANCE DURING THE PERIOD FROM THE FOUNDING OF ST. CYR (1686) THROUGH THE REVOLUTION. THE AUTHOR SUMMARIZES (1) THE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES USED AND (2) THE EDUCATIONAL THEORIES PROPOSED AT THAT TIME. WHILE THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN 18TH-CENTURY FRANCE LEFT MUCH TO BE DESIRED, IT WAS PERHAPS BETTER AND MORE WIDESPREAD THAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN ASSUMED. A CONSIDERABLE PROPORTION OF THE GIRLS OF THE NONPRIVILEGED CLASSES DID AT LEAST RECEIVE AN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION, LEARNING TO READ, WRITE, DO SIMPLE ARITHMETIC, AND ACQUIRE THOSE MANUAL SKILLS, ESPECIALLY NEEDLEWORK, WHICH WOULD BE MOST USEFUL TO THEM IN THE LINES FOR WHICH THEY WERE ULTIMATELY DESTINED. THE DAUGHTERS OF THE WEALTHY BOURGEOISIE AND THE ARISTOCRACY USUALLY RECEIVED THEIR EDUCATION IN CONVENTS WHICH THEY ENTERED AT THE AGE OF 6 OR 7 AND WHICH THEY LEFT AT BETWEEN 16 AND 20 YEARS OF AGE IN ORDER TO MARRY. MANY EDUCATIONAL THEORIES WERE PROPOSED IN FRANCE ESPECIALLY DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY. OPINION WAS NEARLY UNANIMOUS THAT (1) WOMEN'S EDUCATION WAS OF POOR QUALITY AND THERE WAS NEED FOR IMPROVING IT AND (2) PROPOSALS FOR EDUCATION OF WOMEN SHOULD BE BASED UPON AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETY. DIVERGENT VIEWS RANGED FROM FROM FEMINIST SENTIMENT TO ANTIFEMINISM. ON THE WHOLE, HOWEVER, THE CENTURY WAS FAVORABLE TO THE CAUSE OF WOMEN. CHANGING ATTITUDES BROUGHT THE PROPOSAL, MADE DURING THE REVOLUTION, THAT WOMEN SHOULD HAVE COMPLETE EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY BECAUSE OF THEIR NATURAL RIGHTS AS EQUAL MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN RACE. (AL)

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The question of women's education has been recurring ever since Antiquity, imposing itself with particular insistence during periods of intellectual ferment or social upheaval. Whenever, because of radical transformations in the polity, the economy, the technology or the culture of a nation, the role of women has undergone change or been brought into question, a corresponding questioning has occurred in regard to their education. And quite naturally, for if women are to fulfil their role in society, however that role may be conceived, they should of course receive such an education as will better enable them to do so. In our revolutionary times, revolutionary in virtually every thread of the social fabric, traditional beliefs and attitudes concerning women have been changing swiftly, engendering lively, at times indeed heated debate as to women's nature, their role in life and consequently their education. Feminists to the contrary notwithstanding, the question has still not been finally settled; as evidence of this, one need only cite two recent books on women (among a multitude of others), Betty Frieden's The Feminine Mystique and Phyllis McGinley's And Sixpence in Her Shoe, both widely popular and widely praised, yet containing widely divergent views.

The problem, then, broadly, is: what kind or kinds of education are best suited to women? Since any solution to this problem presupposes a certain conception of women, the closely related problem of women's nature and her role in life will necessarily enter into consideration.

Implicit in the broad statement of the problem is a series of more specific problems, namely: Do women have greater aptitude for some subjects than for others? If so, is this "innate" or culturally induced? Should the basic education of women be identical to that of men or importantly different? Should emphasis in the education of women be placed on the utilitarian or on knowledge and culture for their own sake? Should women's education favor the domestic-minded or the career-minded? Should women, if career-minded, be encouraged to enter only certain fields or all fields open to men? What is the value of and justification for women's colleges?

In summary, the problem is what to do about the education of women, how modify it, how improve it, how make it more appropriate to the changing role of women in our society, how best provide for women's various aptitudes, personalities and life-expectations?

Objectives

The problems enumerated above are not, by their very nature, susceptible to neat, definitive solutions, involving as they do centuries of received opinion, the vested interests of the two sexes and the vagaries of human psychology. Indeed, the very effort to find a solution in such matters may itself change conditions to such an extent that no ultimate solution is possible, much as in physical science, according to the indeterminacy principle, no absolute measurements can be made in the realm of sub-atomic particles because the very attempt to establish the position of a particle will at the same time displace that particle from its position.

However, as in other areas of human endeavor, history and the experience and wisdom of thinkers of the past may at least provide us with some useful insights, perhaps even some partial answers to the problem of the education of women, and no period would seem to hold more promise in this respect than the Age of Enlightenment in France. For in this highly sophisticated era, with its passion for ideas and reform, and its predilection for experimentation, many of the best minds addressed themselves to the question of women's education. Every shade of opinion is represented here, from the advocates for the ultra-conservative convent education received by many young women of the time, to the ultra-progressive theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which enjoyed something of a vogue in his own day and which, for better or worse, have had such a heavy impact on modern American education.

Therefore, it will be the purpose of this study to attempt to shed some light on the education of women by (1) describing the various types of education received by young women in 18th century France, from the founding of St.-Cyr (1686) through the Revolutionary period, and (2) setting forth the opinions, theories and plans proposed by the major and minor writers of the period in regard to the education of women, from Fénelon's De l'Education des filles (1687) to Condorcet's Mémoires sur l'Instruction publique (1791, 1792).

Related Literature

This study is based primarily on books, articles, memoirs, letters and other documents of 18th century France. Though the present writer has viewed these primary sources through his own particular optic and has arrived at his own conclusions, a number of secondary source works dealing with specific authors or with various aspects of the education of women have proven suggestive and helpful, in particular, Count de Luppé's Les Jeunes Filles à la fin du XVIII^{e} siècle, which was used extensively in the latter part of the report. An extensive bibliography of works cited or consulted will be found at the end of the study.

Procedure

Data regarding educational practices were obtained from studies based upon documents in national, regional and convent archives, from comments, descriptions and recollections contained in letters, memoirs and news-letters, from advertisements and prospectuses appearing in magazines of the time, and from inferences as to the actual nature of the educational system drawn from works critical of that system. No one in 18th century France was considerate enough to leave us with a total accounting of that epoch's educational practices, and the present study lays no claim to such an achievement 200 years after the fact. Lacunae inevitably exist; nevertheless, **though** a complete recreation of the historical reality is impossible, perhaps even superfluous, it is felt that the available sources are sufficient to paint an objective and reasonably close likeness.

In regard to educational theory, an attempt was made to differentiate and categorize the various opinions and proposals put forth by 18th century French thinkers, to determine quantitatively the dominant views and to identify any discernable trends. A bibliography of works dealing directly or indirectly with educational theory was culled from a variety of sources and is believed to be nearly complete for the period under study, so that a considerable measure of objectivity in reporting prevailing opinions and trends seems possible.

Results

The results, immediately following, are given in the form of seven Chapters, divided into two principle Parts, Practices and Proposals.

PART I

PRACTICES

An Exposition of the Various Types of
Education Received by Frenchwomen
from the Founding of St.-Cyr
(1686) through the
Revolutionary
Period.

CHAPTER I

EDUCATION FOR THE NON-PRIVILEGED CLASSES

A) The Petites Ecoles

Primary education for the non-privileged classes was more widespread under the ancien régime than is perhaps generally imagined. Though education beyond the elementary level was restricted, especially in the case of girls, to the moneyed bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, there exists an ample body of evidence indicating that the daughters of peasants, laborers and artisans, from the indigent to the moderately prosperous, had considerable opportunity to acquire at least the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as certain manual arts suitable to women. During the 18th century, in virtually every region of France, in country villages no less than in towns and cities, large numbers of families, perhaps even a majority, availed themselves of this educational opportunity by sending their daughters to what were known as the Petites Ecoles, the Little Schools, a designation used as early as the Council of Trent (1545-1563), where it was declared that there shall be "in each parish, in cities and in the country, a little school whose master, preceptor or regent, chosen by the bishop, will, free of charge, teach poor children reading, writing, grammar, singing and arithmetic."[1]

What precisely were these so-called Little Schools? The question is not easily answered, for under the *ancien régime* in France, there was little uniformity in primary education, lines of jurisdiction were vaguely drawn and different types of schools served different social and economic milieux. The situation was not unlike the present one in the United States, where we have at once free public primary schools, secular private schools and parochial private schools, each with its own methods, its own emphasis, its own goals, its own teacher requirements, varying in quality from community to community and conforming to different regulations from city to city and state to state.

Perhaps the simplest and most comprehensive way of defining the Little Schools is to say that they were an attempt by the Church, the state and local communities to provide at least an elementary education to everyone in France who could not, or did not wish, to obtain one in other ways, that is, through private tutors at home or by sending one's son to a more or less expensive *collège*, usually Jesuit, and one's daughter to a boarding-school convent, run by any one of a dozen different teaching orders. That is, the Little Schools were meant for those who could not afford to provide private tutors for their children or send them to live-in convents or *collèges*, which were usually quite costly. (However, the children of impoverished families, if they had the good fortune to live near a convent-school or a *collège*, could as *externes*, that is, day students, receive an education at one or the other free of charge.)

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[1] Cited by Maurice Gontord, *L'Enseignement Primaire en France de la Révolution à la loi Guizot*. Paris, n.d., p. 10.

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The Little Schools received their inital impetus from the Council of Trent, as noted above, but it was not until several years later, after a series of provincial councils, that they began to take root and spread. For example, in 1584 the archbishop of Bourges, following the local council of Bourges, wrote: "We direct all parish priests to maintain little schools in their parishes...The boys' school may be taught by the priest or his vicar and the girls' school by a woman of piety or probity. If the priest or his vicar cannot keep school, he may choose, alone or with the people of the parish, a person capable of teaching...and send him to us to be approved, after having passed the examination and bringing with him a certificate of good moral conduct. The same will be observed for the instruction of girls."[2]

Not long thereafter, towards the beginning of the 17th century, the state began issuing a series of proclamations pertaining to the Little Schools, thus adding the royal authority to the Church authority. An edict of 1606 declares that schoolteachers in towns and villages must be approved by the parish priest.[3] A letter by Louis XIII dated December 15, 1640 directs that co-educational schools be avoided and that male teachers be put in charge of boys' schools and female teachers be put in charge of girls' schools.[4] A royal declaration of 1698 calls for the establishment of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in all the parishes of France; a uniform salary of 150 pounds per year for schoolmasters and 100 pounds per year for schoolmistresses, which salaries were to be raised, if necessary, by imposing a special tax on all the inhabitants of a parish; and finally, compulsory education up to the age of 14, judges being empowered to punish those who failed to respect this obligation.[5] Other declarations of 1700 and 1724 repeat, with minor modifications, the essential points of the preceeding declaration of 1698, which would appear at first sight to be of considerable importance in the history of education. For what we have here is nothing less than the establishment of free, public, universal education, compulsory to the age of 14 and with teachers on a fixed salary scale, conditions which were still being fought for in France nearly two hundred years later, towards the end of the nineteenth century. Does this mean that the Revolution wiped out enormous gains made under the *ancien régime* and that battles that had once been won had to be fought over again?

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[2] Cited by Gontord, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[3] Charles Fourrier, *L'Enseignement francais de l'Antiquité à la Révolution.* Paris, 1964, p. 139.

Yes and no. Virtually all authorities in the field agree that, despite the best intentions of Church and state, true universal primary education was never achieved under the *ancien régime*.

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[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

"Nothing could be more explicit than these regulations," writes H.C. Barnard, whose comment is typical, "but there is plenty of evidence to show that it was found impossible to enforce compulsory elementary education. The difficulties were many; sufficient funds to finance such a project were not available; the public opinion of the day held the office of elementary teacher in low esteem; there was no widespread desire on the part of parents of the poorer classes to avail themselves of an education for their children even when it was offered free of cost."[6]

Yet there is also plenty of evidence to show that the Little Schools flourished throughout the 18th century in almost every region of France and in both urban and rural areas, and that they were, for the most part, fairly well-attended. In 1736 there were, in Paris alone, 191 such schools for boys and 170 for girls, with a teaching personnel, including auxiliaries, of about 600 men and women.[7] In 45 parishes in and around the city of Châlons-sur-Marne, there were 53 schools prior to 1790.[8] In the 2052 communes of the departments of la Meurthe, la Meuse, la Moselle and les Vosges, the scholar L. Maggiolo counted 1993 which had, in 1789, mixed primary schools, and 293 which had separate schools for girls.[9] "In Normandy," reports

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[6] H.C. Barnard, *The French Tradition in Education*. Cambridge, 1922, p. 40.

[7] Fourrier, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[8] M. Fayet, *Recherches Historiques et Statistiques sur les communes et les ecoles de la Haute-Marne*. Paris, 1879, p. 287.

[9] L. Maggiolo, *Les Ecoles en Lorraine avant et après 1789*. Nancy, 1890, p. 82.

Armand Ravelet, "out of 1159 rural parishes visited by the archbishop of Rouen from 1710 to 1717, 855 were provided with schools and only 304 were without any; 306 had schools both for boys and for girls."[10]

As early as the 16th century, a Venitian ambassador declared that there seemed to be no one in France who did not know how to read and write.[11] And Philippe Aries states confidently, "We know that in the second half of the 17th century the little schools existed everywhere..."[12] Finally, Abbe Allain writes that in the second half of the 18th century, primary instruction had increased enormously, careers in the liberal professions had been opened wide to the poor, and the children of working class families were flocking by the thousand to primary schools.[13]

Such opinions are surely exaggerated, for there can be no doubt that illiteracy was still widespread on the eve of the Revolution. A common method of obtaining statistics on illiteracy under the _ancien régime_ (or, inversely, on presumed primary school attendance) has been through a study of signatures of husbands and wives in the marriage registers of various communities throughout

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[10] Armand Ravelet, _Histoire du vénérable Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, fondateur de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes_. Paris, 1874, p. 25.

[11] From _Relations des ambassadeurs vénitiens_. Cited by Albert Babeau, _Le Village sous l'Ancien Régime_. Paris, 1879, 2nd ed., p. 285.

[12] Philippe Ariès, _L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime_. Paris, 1960, p. 321.

[13] Abbé Allain, _L'Instruction primaire en France avant la Révolution_. Paris, 1881, p. 119.

France. One such study, conducted in the town of Draguignan in Provence, and covering the 100 year span from 1690 to 1790, shows an increase of 60% in the number of men who were able to sign their names and an increase of 134% in the number of women.[14] These increases are pointed to with pride, and rightly so, by those who, for one reason or another, are concerned to show the extent of primary education under the *ancien régime*. But the statistics they are based upon tell another story, one of considerable illiteracy: in 1790, only 46% of the men in this same town of Draguignan were able to sign their names (up from 28.6% in 1690), and only 18% of the women (up from 7.7% in 1690).[15] Thus, it may be assumed that in a small, not untypical provincial town at the end of the 18th century, fewer than half the men and one-fifth of the women had received a primary education of one sort or another. The Venitian ambassador must not have gotten into the country to meet the plain folk.

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Under whose jurisdiction did the Little Schools fall and from what sources did they receive their financial support? Because the central authority lacked either the will or the means to enforce the declarations regarding the Little Schools, resulting in a relatively wide diversity of practices, the matter of jurisdiction and financial support becomes quite complex. It can be said in general that the state, though still retaining ultimate authority and still playing a certain active role, had delegated to the Church the actual running of the Little Schools, to such an extent that it could be considered "a veritable transfer of power."[16] The Church, in turn, collaborated closely with local communities in regard to such matters as the selection of teachers and the financial support of the schools. Moreover, it was not unusual for wealthy private individuals to establish endowments for the creation and continuous financing of elementary schools, for both boys and girls.

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[14] Alfred des Cilleuls, *Histoire de l'enseignement libre dans l'ordre primaire en France*. Paris, 1898, p. 39.

[15] M. Mireur, *Documents sur l'enseignement primaire en Provence avant 1789*. s.l., s.d. (From the *Revue des Sociétés savantes*, 7e serie t. III, 1880) pp. 5,6.

The *de facto* jurisdiction of the Church can perhaps best be seen in the relationship of the local clergy to the schoolteacher, for the teacher, after all, constituted the main, indeed almost the sole element of the Little Schools. The function of the clergy here was threefold: (1) to establish regulations governing the conduct of the teachers; (2) to participate in the selection of new teachers; and (3) to provide for continuing inspection of the teachers selected.

In 1685, the bishop of Autun, Monsieur de Roquette, issued a set of regulations governing the Little Schools; divided into two parts, the first part deals with "the conduct of teachers in regard to themselves" and the second, "the duties of schoolmasters towards their pupils."[17]

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[16] Fourrier, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

[17] From *Ordonnances synodales de Monseigneur l'évêque d'Autun*. Autun, 1705. Cited by Anatole de Charmasse, *Etat de l'instruction primaire dans l'ancien diocèse d'Autun pendant les dix-septième et dix-huitième siècles*. Paris, 1878, 2nd ed., p. 28.

These regulations, which were printed and posted in the schools, cast considerable light on several aspects of the Little Schools, and we shall be returning to them later. Of immediate interest is the first article, which sets down the conditions teachers must meet in order to practice their profession: they must present to _the bishop or his vicars_ a certificate of good moral conduct, their baptismal certificate and, if they are married, their marriage contract; they must, in addition, undergo an examination and, if they are considered capable of teaching, they are required to take an oath to acquit themselves faithfully of their duties and to observe the regulations. (Later, to spare teacher-candidates the difficulties and the expense of a trip to Autun, local arch-priests were empowered to examine and authorise them).[18]

In Jousse's _Traité du gouvernement spirituel et temporel des paroisses_ of 1769, it is laid down that schoolmasters and schoolmistresses must have the approbation or visa of the bishop or the ecclesiastic in charge of education in the diocese, and sometimes of the local parish priest.[19]

The Little Schools of Paris fell under the authority of the dean of the cathedral of Notre Dame, and more specifically under his delegate, the precentor. The precentor was aided in his duties by two assistants and a clerk. It was he who established the number of schools and their location and the number of students to be admitted. It was he also who inspected the schools and drew up the regulations governing them. But perhaps the most important of the precentor's duties was to take oaths from the teachers and to furnish them with letters of competence, for which they paid, sometimes indeed quite dearly.[20]

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[18] _Ibid_., p. 29.

[19] Cited by M. Fayet, _op. cit_., p. 47.

Each year in Paris, there was a sort of pedagogical conference called the *annual synode*, which all the schoolmasters and mistresses of the city were expected to attend. At the synode of 1672, a certain Martin Sonnet, one of the precentor's two assistants, delivered himself of an "exhortation" which is worth citing at length for the light it sheds on the quality, goals and general atmosphere of the Little Schools.

> Vous êtes commis, messieurs et mesdames, et établis par monsieur le chantre de l'église de Paris, non seulement pour enseigner aux enfants à lire, à ecrire, l'arithmétique, le calcul tant au jet qu'à la plume, le service, la grammaire, mais encore pour leur enseigner le catéchisme ou l'instruction de la doctrine chrétienne, c'est-à-dire la science des saints, le chemin du ciel, et les bonnes moeurs, avec la practique de toutes les vertus chrétiennes et morales, tant par l'instruction verbale que par vos bons exemples...
>
> Notre Seigneur commença à faire et puis à enseigner. Il enseigna premièrement par ses actions et ensuite par ses paroles. *Plus enim movent exempla quam verba*.
>
> Vous devez donc leur enseigner avec les bonnes lettres tout le bien qu'ils sont obligés de faire pour servir Dieu et pour être sauvés, c'est-à-dire, en deux mots, la science et la vertu, qui sont les deux plus beaux dons, les deux plus belles qualités et les deux plus beaux talents qu'un homme puisse posséder en ce monde. C'est ce que David demandait à Dieu très souvent, et le priait instamment de lui enseigner... Vous devez avoir ces deux qualités de savant et de vertueux tout ensemble; et ce n'est pas assez d'avoir l'une sans l'autre, parce que la science sans la vertu rend l'homme superbe, et la vertu sans la science le rend inutile...
>
> Enseignez-les d'être bien obéissants à leurs père et mère, à leurs parents, à leurs maîtres et maîtresses, à leurs

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[20] Fourrier, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

> supérieurs et à tout le monde; souvenez-vous encore que vous devez enseigner les pauvres gratuitement aussi bien que les autres.[21]

While in some localities the clergy seems to have assumed sole responsibility for the hiring of teachers, this function generally devolved jointly upon the clergy and the citizens of the local community or their representatives in the town council.

"In Paris, Lyons and a few other large cities," writes Albert Babeau, "it seems that the municipal authorities did not intervene in the choice of teachers for the little schools. It was not the same elsewhere, however, and one can point to the conflict between the precentor and the city of Mâcon in regard to the appointment of one of these teachers."[22]

Conflict arose also on the question of whether teachers should be chosen by the town council or by all the inhabitants of a community. Babeau, in his book on the village under the _ancien régime_, a companion to his work on cities, quotes the opinion of a committee of the provincial assembly of Champagne, upholding the right of all the citizens to make decisions regarding the teachers of their communities. "The wages of schoolteachers," declared the committee, "are generally paid by each head of family; every inhabitant has a personal right to vote on the retention, the dismissal or the replacement of these public men, and we believe that the deliberations of the communities relative to these questions must be made or confirmed in a general assembly of the inhabitants."[23]

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[21] Cited by Philibert Pompée, _Rapport historique sur les écoles primaires de la ville de Paris, depuis leur origine jusqu'à la loi du 28 juin 1833_. Paris, 1839, pp. 68,69.

[22] Albert Babeau, _La Ville sous l'Ancien Régime_. Paris, 1880, p. 486.

This appears to be the procedure followed in most country parishes.[24] However, in larger towns and cities (except for the largest: Paris, Lyons and a few others, as previously noted), the teachers were usually chosen by the notables of the vicinity, including the local clergy, in the name of the community. Such for example was the case in Libourne, where the "political council," composed of the mayor, the magistrates and six "upright men," participated in the appointment of schoolmasters.[25]

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* *

Financial support for the Little Schools, which meant, in effect, the payment of the teachers' salaries, generally came, in one form or another, from the local community, occasionally from the Church or wealthy individuals, never from the state. Though the royal declaration of 1698 called for wages of 150 pounds for schoolmasters and 100 pounds for schoolmistresses, this varied widely from community to community, usually on the low side. Charmasse states that while the diocesan authorities of Autun recommended a uniform tax, they also suggested that consideration be given to the customs and poverty of the locality, the result of which qualification was to introduce a great variety in the matter of wages, depending upon place, time, population and the tastes and wealth of the citizenry.[26]

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[23] From a letter of June 17, 1788 in the Archives of the department of Aube. Cited by Albert Babeau, Le Village sous l'Ancien Régime, pp. 290, 291.

[24] See also Charmasse, op. cit., p. 59; A. Bellée, Recherches sur l'instruction publique dans le département de la Sarthe avant et pendant la Révolution, Le Mans, 1875, p. 13; Fayet, op. cit., p. 48.

[25] Allain, op. cit., p. 123.

Funds were raised, first of all, by what Charmasse calls free and proportional taxation: free in the sense that it applied only to those who sent their children to school; proportional in that it took into account the extent of instruction, that is, five sous a month for those who were learning only to read, ten sous when writing was added, and fifteen sous if arithmetic and Latin were included.[27] These "fees" varied from place to place: in Malay in 1701 it was three sous for reading and five each for writing, arithmetic and plain chant;[28] in Doulaincourt in 1750, four, five, six or seven sous, depending upon the level of instruction.[29]

Another method of raising money for education, practiced in certain communities, was through a system of taxation imposed on all the inhabitants of a parish, but proportional to their status or occupation, and payable in cash or in kind. Thus, in Saint Beury, ploughmen were taxed 1 pound 16 sous per household, day-laborers 1 pound 6 sous per household, and widows 15 sous per household.[30]

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[26] Charmasse, op. cit., p. 47.

[27] Ibid., p. 48.

[28] Fayet, op. cit., p. 68.

[29] Ibid., p. 71.

Often teachers were paid through a combination of means. In Corcelle-les-Ars in 1784, the schoolmaster received a fixed salary of 60 pounds, plus the "fees" of his pupils, plus a certain quantity of the local wine and grain contributed by the inhabitants. In Bouilland in 1772, a sheaf of wheat from each farmhand was added to a salary of 95 pounds and voluntary contributions. In Aloxe in 1776, it was a contribution of wine, a salary of 100 pounds a year, the fees and extra money earned through the performance of certain duties in the church.[31]

In addition, the schoolteacher was often given a lodging, a garden, sometimes the right to graze his cows on community property or to cut the grass from around the graves. He also enjoyed the special privileges of exemption from taxation and from service in the militia.[32]

Not infrequently, wealthy individuals would establish endowments in favor of the Little Schools. In 1698, the countess de Grignon left a perpetual annuity of 100 pounds, to be taken from the income from her estates, in order to provide for a schoolmistress for the town of Villemorien. The teacher, either a lay person or a nun, was to teach the girls of the parish "Christian doctrine and reading and writing." She was also expected to care for the sick.[33] The marquis de Louvois gave, in 1689, a sum of 21,000 pounds, yielding 700 pounds of income, for the maintenance of two sisters of the order of St. Lazare in the town of Louvois. In addition to caring for the sick and distributing 400 pounds of the income for the relief of the poor (the other 300 pounds, they used for their own maintenance), they were to provide elementary education to the girls of the vicinity free of charge.[34] In 1753, Philippe Boidot, a doctor of theology at the Sorbonne and one of the chaplains of Notre Dame, willed a sum of 11,000 pounds for the founding and maintenance in Autun of two free schools, one for boys and one for girls. They were to be established in favor of the poor children of the neighborhood of Marchaux, where the benefactor had been born.[35]

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[30] Charmasse, op. cit., p. 48.

[31] Ibid., p. 52.

[32] Fourrier, op. cit., p. 145.

Though no budgetary allocations in favor of the Little Schools can be found in the records of the central government, the state did, nevertheless, play a certain role in primary education. This consisted mainly of approving or disapproving the school taxes voted by the local communities, for in matters of taxation, the state ruled supreme. For example, representatives of the crown were opposed to the practice of payments in kind, which no doubt went against their habits of orderliness and regularity. In Bourgogne, by the end of the 18th century, this practice all but disappeared at the insistence of the king's commissioner.[36]

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[33] Albert Babeau, L'Instruction primaire dans les campagnes avant 1789 d'après des documents tirés des archives communales et départementales de l'Aube. Troyes, 1875, p. 46.

[34] J. Chardon, "Etat général de l'instruction dans la diocèse de Reims vers la fin du XVIII^e siècle." Revue de Champagne et de Brie, Sept. 1881, p. 228.

[35] Charmasse, op. cit., pp. 69, 70.

It can be seen, then, that while the local community, or sometimes a wealthy individual, provided the funds to support the Little Schools, and while the state passed on the manner of raising the funds, the main responsibility for elementary education in France under the *ancien régime* fell upon the Church, which drew up the rules and regulations, participated in the selection of teachers and provided for periodic inspections.

It can be seen also that, except for those established by private endowments, the Little Schools were generally not free, the pupils in attendance often having to pay a fee or tuition which varied in accordance with what they were learning. However, in community after community, the Little Schools were instituted and teachers hired with the understanding that indigent children would be accepted without charge. The bishop of Chalons, in establishing separate schools for girls, declared in an edict of 1693: "Schoolmistresses will accept without distinction the children of the rich and the poor and will display an equal affection towards both, even though they shall receive no payment from the poor."[37] This admonition to teach the poor free of charge is reported so frequently in regional studies on primary education prior to the Revolution, that we can safely assume it was a practice generally accepted throughout France.

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[36] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[37] Fayet, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

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Physically, what were the Little Schools like? According to instructions laid down by an anonymous priest towards the end of the 17th century,

> The room in which class is conducted should be large and spacious, in proportion to the number of children to be taught in it; for example, a room 26 feet long by 17 or 18 feet wide and 12 feet high is required for about 100 children, so that the heat will not cause any bad odors, resulting in illness to either the teacher or the pupils, especially in Paris where the air is quite horrid; and on this basis, the rest should be constructed proportionately. The room should be well provided with windows with glass panes, or at least transparent paper ones. And if it be possible for the room to have windows on three sides, and even all four, this would be best, for in summer, when the weather is warm, there cannot be too much air to dispel all the bad smells of the children.
>
> In the winter the windows should be tightly closed because of the cold, to which children who are forced to remain in one place and not stir about, are very sensitive; nevertheless, the teacher will order someone to open them as soon as everyone leaves the room, in order to get out the bad air and bring in fresh air, and then reclose them a little before the pupils return; and when the weather is mild, he will keep them open during the lesson.[38]

Though the room may seem rather crowded to us of today, such were the conditions deemed optimum under the ancien régime. The reality, however, did not always equal the ideal: Fourrier points out that in the mountains, it was not rare for the school to be located in a stable, where a soft warmth would reign.[39] Elsewhere, heating was usually at the expense of the families, each child bringing a log to school in the morning.[40]

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[38] Anon., Instruction méthodique pour l'école paroissiale, dressée en faveur des petites écoles. Paris, 1685, p. 49.

The schoolrooms, such as they were, were sometimes provided by the Church, according to Babeau, but more often they were built or purchased solely with community funds.[41] Fourrier adds that the teacher himself would sometimes rent a schoolroom, as inexpensively, of course, as possible.[42]

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Most of the Little Schools were apparently open only during the winter, from La Toussaints (November 1st) to Easter; others, however, remained open 10 or 11 months of the year.[43] In Coutances, according to the regulations governing the Little Schools, published by the bishop of the diocese in 1766, classes were to be held six days a week, except for holidays. The regulations also stipulated that, from La Saint Michel (September 29th) until Easter, schoolmasters and mistresses would start school at 9 in the morning and again at one-thirty in the afternoon; and from Easter until summer vacation, they would start at 8 in the morning and at 2 in the afternoon, each session lasting two full hours.[44] School hours were longer in Autun, where the bishop decreed that class shall start at seven-thirty in the morning and continue to ten-thirty between Easter and La Toussaints; and at eight o'clock to ten-thirty between La Toussaints and Easter. Throughout the year, afternoon classes in the diocese of Autun were to be held from one-thirty to four.[45]

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[39] Fourrier, op. cit., p. 145.

[40] Ibid., p. 145.

[41] Babeau, L'Instruction primarie, p. 28.

[42] Fourrier, op. cit., p. 145.

[43] Babeau, L'Instruction primaire, p. 36.

Thus, there was considerable variation in the length of both the school year and the school day. Moreover, despite the injunction in the king's declaration of 1698, making school attendance obligatory up to the age of 14, there is little evidence to suggest that this injunction was widely, or even usually, adhered to. In 1695 or 1696, M. Henry de Thiard de Bissy, bishop of Toul, ordered the parents of his diocese to send their children, both boys and girls, to school under pain of losing the sacraments.[46] Such a command, with its attendant punishment in case of non-compliance, was no doubt uniformly observed in the diocese of Toul. But such ordonnances are rare, and the amount of illiteracy, as measured by the number of husbands and wives who were able to sign their names in the marriage registries of their local communities, strongly indicates that school attendance, even in localities where Little Schools existed, was far from universal. Considering France as a whole, it is doubtful that more than 50% of the men and 25% of the women were receiving an elementary education by the end of the 18th century, which, however, represents a hugh increase over preceeding centuries. The _ancien régime_ had begun to bestow an education on its lower classes, and in so doing, in teaching its most impoverished and downtrodden children to read, and to read not only the catechism and the lives of the saints, but also Voltaire and Rousseau, it perhaps hastened its own downfall.

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[44] Abbe Allain, op. cit., p. 154.

[45] Charmasse, op. cit., p. 31.

[46] Alexandre Ott, Un Mot sur l'instruction primaire. Nancy, 1880, p. 7.

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One of the questions that seems to have bulked large in educational thinking under the _ancien régime_ was the separation of the sexes in the Little Schools. Everywhere, teachers were admonished not to conduct mixed classes, or if so, only under special conditions. A statute of 1687 in the diocese of Besançon spells out the dangers and lays down a formal prohibition:

> Since the senses, the thoughts and the hearts of men are, from adolescence, inclined to evil, we, wishing with all our might to avert the innumerable dangers of a too great familiarity between youths of the opposite sex, formally forbid schoolmasters to accept girls over nine years of age in their classes, or even to instruct those who are under this age, except at times and in places separate from those used for the instruction of boys.[47]

The danger, apparently, was not limited to contact between boys and girls, for the bishop of Acqs reports in a letter of 1752 that he had been obliged to chase certain teachers from his diocese because of "horrors committed with young girls."[48] In Toul, in 1686, a synodal statute decreed that boys and girls were not to be admitted to the same schools and that "schoolmasters were not to teach girls in their homes, nor schoolmistresses boys, under pain of excommunication."[49] M. de Roquette, Bishop of Autun, writes in 1669 that the mixing of boys and girls has always been a bad thing and that he had even learned of some "distressing accidents." He therefore felt it necessary to order the establishment of two schools in each parish, one for girls and one for boys, the girls' school to be taught by a woman and the boys' school by a man; and under pain of excommunication, schoolmasters were not to admit girls to their classes and schoolmistresses were not to admit boys.[50]

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[47] Fayet, _op_. _cit_., pp. 281, 282.

However, according to most researchers, the prohibition against mixed schooling was not generally enforced or adhered to, and in communities where only one school existed, a not infrequent occurrence, girls were usually admitted to class along with boys.[51]

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[48] Viconte Sérurier, *L'Instruction primaire dans la région des Pyrénées occidentales, spécialement en Béarn, 1385-1789*. Pau, 1874, p. 10.

[49] Ott, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[50] Charmasse, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[51] Edmond Poupé, *L'Enseignement primaire et l'enseignement des filles à Draguignon sous l'ancien régime et la révolution*. Draguignon, 1897, p. 28. Also, Charmasse, *op. cit.*, p. 29. Abbé Rameau, "L'Instruction primaire à Mâcon avant 1789." *Revue de la Société Littéraire, Historique et Archéologique du département de l'Ain*, juillet-août 1878, p. 179. Abbé Allain, *op. cit.*, p. 236. Abbé Gillant, *Les Ecoles de filles avant la Révolution*. Verdun, 1893, pp. 11, 12.

When separate schools were maintained, it was often the wife or the daughter of the schoolmaster who took charge of the girls.[52] Or, in many cases, a lay person, a "pious, God-fearing" spinster or widow, was hired for the position by the community. In 1703, the communal council of the town of Draguignan at the request of the bishop of Fréjus, contributed a lodging to a "woman of great virtue" who had come to the town "to instruct girls and to teach them to be virtuous."[53] In Verdun, in 1726, a secular schoolmistress by the name of Marie-Jeanne La Roche opened a school with the permission of the town council, which accorded her the usual exemptions given to schoolmasters.[54] Often, no doubt, the women who devoted themselves to the education of girls were perhaps better known for their piety than their science, but in Dijon, there existed a sort of guild for schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, and to be admitted to it, one was required to pass an examination.[55] Babeau also mentions the existence of pious spinsters who voluntarily devoted themselves, without remuneration, to the teaching of poor girls.[56]

Where did these women receive their teacher training? For most of them, the answer must be nowhere. A few, however, had the opportunity to attend a secular normal school, a very limited number of which were founded in the latter part of the 17th century. In 1672, the bishop of Châlons established several female lay teachers in the principal towns of his diocese for the purpose of "attending to the Christian education of young girls" and "training schoolmistresses in order to send them out into the parishes."[57] The young women attending these "normal schools" lived in, but it was strictly forbidden to them to take any kind of vows or to form any regular community; neither were they to "possess, have, receive or acquire in common any inheritances, annuities or settlements, or any domaine other than the houses necessary for their lodging and the performance of their exercises."[58] This institution, according to Cillieuls, was immediately imitated in the neighboring diocese of Reims,[59] and was itself an imitation, according to Babeau, of similar establishments existing in "several diocese of France."[60]

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[52] Soeur Marie-Pierre Fracard, L'Education des filles à Niort au XVII^{e} siècle. Niort, 1950, p. 43. Also, Abbé Rameau, op. cit., p. 179.

[53] Poupé, op. cit., p. 33.

[54] Abbé Gillant, op. cit, pp. 12, 13.

[55] Babeau, La Ville sous l'ancien régime, p. 495.

[56] Ibid.

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What were the qualities, ideally, that the 18th century sought in its primary school teachers? These were laid out, conveniently and touchingly, in a book of instructions for the use of schoolmasters and mistresses in the Little Schools.[61] The manual, first published in 1685, was widely read for the next 100 years. It is full of human understanding, good common sense and many practical suggestions for handling pupils, for teaching them the various disciplines and, in general, for running a school. Many of our present-day schoolteachers could very well profit from some of its advice. A few citations, giving the tone of the book, will necessarily have to suffice here.

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[57] Ibid., p. 493.

[58] Cillieuls, op. cit., p. 333.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Babeau, La Ville, p. 495.

> Just as the heart is the first to come alive and the last to die in man, and is the principal repository of the soul, so the master in school must be the heart, animated by the spirit of God, which gives spiritual life to his whole little family... In order to impart the Christian spirit to children in the little schools, one must choose a person, either ecclesiastic or lay, who not only possesses all the common and Christian virtues, but who has studied them so carefully that he can teach them with facility to all those who are placed under him, both by precept and by example.[62]

On the prudence of the teacher in regard to his pupils:

> The teacher must content himself with what his pupils are capable of doing. Just as a teacher of writing must provide examples that are well-formed and perfect, while contenting himself with a pupil who, in the beginning, will write only imperfectly, so a schoolmaster must be perfect in everything he teaches his pupils and must be content with those whom he knows are doing their little best (though they do little indeed), unless they show themselves to be completely inept in learning to read, which for some will become evident after a month or two and for others after four or six months, depending upon the care and diligence they put into it; thereupon, having tried every possible method without success, he must let their parents know, asking them to have patience and holding out to them the hope that perhaps their child's

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[61] Anon., Instruction méthodique pour l'escole parcissiale, dressée en faveur des petites écoles. Paris, 1685.

[62] Ibid., p. 1.

> wit will return, and that in the meantime they be kind enough to withdraw him for a while; for often, parents blame the teacher and not the pupil if the latter learns nothing.[63]

On the patience of the teacher in regard to his pupils:

> Sometimes there are pupils who serve only to try the patience of the teacher, some because of their stupidity, and they must be tolerated when there is no malice intended; others because of their laziness, and they must be punished; others because of their bad habits of wheedling or dallying, and they have to be redeemed with great patience, or in the end, if they fail to reform, be made to leave school; others out of pure malice, and they must be worked on and punished with prudence and discretion... But in all cases, patience is very necessary, principally for suffering the reproaches of the poor; for since the poor are naturally quite angry and upset because of their need, they believe that when the teacher makes them wait to take their children, it is only because of their poverty.[64]

On the personal comportment of the teachers:

> If he is often invited to drink or eat in town, he must express his gratitude and excuse himself politely, and accept as seldom as possible, especially if he is an ecclesiastic.[65]

Other qualities of the teacher that the anonymous author of the manual discusses with the same warm-heartedness and down-to-earth sensibleness are temperance, chastity, modesty, humility, perseverance, strength, magnanimity and confidence.

Not only must teachers refuse too-frequent invitations to drink or dine in town, but in addition, according to regulations published by a bishop in the department of Aube in 1785, they are forbidden "to maintain taverns, to play the violin or other instruments in public, to attend dances and parties, to frequent cabarets, or to engage in any traffic, or to exercise any employment which is incompatible with their position."[66] The bishop of Autun, in 1685, advises schoolteachers to be modest in their dress and their bearing, to be restrained in their conversation, to shun cabarets and games of chance, and to flee evil company.[67] Addressing himself specifically to women teachers, the bishop of Châlons, in 1672, declares that since "schoolmistresses are destined to instruct by word and by example, they will take great pains themselves to practice all the virtues they must instill in others. They will employ their time well and avoid ever being without something useful to do."[68]

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[63] Ibid., p. 13.

[64] Ibid., p. 30.

[65] Ibid., p. 19.

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Contrary to H.C. Barnard's assertion that "the public opinion of the day held the office of elementary teacher in low esteem,"[69] it would appear that the schoolmaster was second only to the parish priest in the respect and affection accorded him by the community.[70]

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[66] Babeau, L'Instruction primaire, p. 83.

[67] Charmasse, op. cit., p. 30.

[68] Fayet, op. cit., p. 283.

[69] Supra, p.5.

[70] Roger Gal, Histoire de l'éducation. Paris, 1963, p. 79.

If length of service is any indication of this, then one may be fairly sure that such was the case, for Charmasse and Abbé Allain cite numerous instances of teachers who served 20, 30 and 40 years in the same community, who were rewarded with pensions when they reached old age, and whose sons were appointed to the positions they had vacated. In 1787, Jean Lamy had been schoolmaster in Grignon for 50 years.[71] In 1767, although the schoolmaster in the village of Corgoloin, who had been teaching in that community for thirty years, had reached the age of 71, the inhabitants nevertheless desired to continue his appointment "because of the talent he has for instructing the youth." The schoolmaster, however, decided to retire, whereupon it was recorded in the minutes of a meeting of the town council that "several members of the community, and among them the most notable, would like, by way of expressing their gratitude to him, to be permitted to provide him with a life-annuity at the expiration of his contract."[72]

"Once a teacher was accepted," writes Abbé Allain, "it was extremely rare for him to be replaced, and frequently the position of teacher was perpetuated in the same family."[73] In certain parishes of the district of Yonne only three or four teachers filled a given post in the course of an entire century.[74] In Saint-Pervay-

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[71] Charmasse, op. cit., p. 91.

[72] Ibid., pp. 91, 92.

[73] Abbe Allain, op. cit., p. 136.

[74] Ibid.

Espreux, the Little School had only seven teachers from 1678 to 1792, one of whom submitted his resignation after 45 years of service because, he claimed, he was being persecuted by the lord of the parish.[75] Such examples can be multiplied until little doubt remains that, by and large, primary school teachers enjoyed the confidence and respect of the communities in which they taught and, usually, lived out their lives.

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Children were not sent off to school until about the age of 7 or 8, according to Aries, and left at the age of 11 or 12 to begin their life's work.[76] However, according to Babeau, since in many places school was conducted only during the winter months, it was not unusual for pupils to continue until the age of 16 or 18.[77] Those who populated the Little Schools came mainly from the working classes -- farmers, day-laborers, artisans; sometimes from the middle classes -- shopkeepers, tradesmen, professionals; never from the homes of the wealthy or noble, who could afford to employ private tutors at home or to send their children to expensive convent schools or private *collèges*. In 1748, the municipal officers of the town of Boulonge-sur-Mer decided it would be a good idea to have "a public school for girls of the middle class whose fathers are not able to put them in convents and who are loathe to send them to the charity school."[78] What the town councilors were calling for was, in effect, a Little School for middle class girls.

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[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Aries, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

[77] Babeau, *Le Village*, p. 293.

It was common practice in the Little Schools for the teacher to choose several of his pupils for the performance of various duties. Observers or Monitors were appointed "to watch over the class and diligently take note of the chatterers when the teacher is not there... or those who murmur while studying their lessons."[79] There were also Water Fetchers, Sweepers, Preceptors ("the smartest in the class, to help the others with their lessons"), Prayer Reciters, Readers and Writing Officers; included in the last were Guardians of the Ink and Powder and, finally, the Ink Well Fillers.[80] The following passage from the Instruction méthodique on the Ink Problem gives a fascinatingly intimate glimpse into the day to day life of the Little Schools.

> Each pupil will take care to bring to school good ink for writing, in his ink-horn, and the ink shall be neither muddy nor too light, but well-colored, very clear and even-flowing. The procedure being followed now in several well-run schools is quite good, for it does away with all the reproaches resulting from the indecencies that children are in the habit of perpetrating upon each other, sometimes taking the ink of their classmates when they have failed to bring any themselves, sometimes, in taking it furtively, letting it drop on the work or paper of their classmates, which very often causes disorder in the classroom. To remedy this, and many other knaveries which are committed by children, to whom money is given for the purchase of ink

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[78] Cilleuls, op. cit., p. 42. Charity schools, which will be discussed later, were elementary schools run by various religious teaching orders for the benefit of the indigent.

[79] Instruction méthodique, pp. 71, 72.

[80] Ibid., pp. 68-79.

> and which they spend otherwise, it has been established that each pupil who is learning to write will give in advance, at the beginning of the month, one sou to one of the most trustworthy members of the class, who will be chosen for this function and who will take care to purchase and furnish ink communally to all the pupils; which ink will be put in ink-horns of lead or of horn set in plaster and secured to the pupils' desks by means of four little pegs, so that they cannot be overturned. And this procedure must be strictly adhered to by all the children who are learning to write, pointing out the harmful consequences to parents who voice any objections.[81]

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Discipline in the Little Schools was no doubt stricter than in our present era of permissiveness, but, despite the fact that corporal punishment was permitted, it was far from unreasonable; indeed, in its moderation and common-sensicalness, its fairness, its understanding of children and its emphasis on morality, it is not inconceivable that it helped form better citizens and better human beings than our present-day methods. Two chapters devoted to the question of discipline in a pedagogical work of the 18th century admirably illustrate the characteristics just mentioned.[82] The first of the two chapters deals with "That Which Must Be Avoided in the Punishment of Children." (a) Above all, there must be good reason for meting out punishment. (b) All excesses must be avoided. (c) Whims, ill-humor or emotion should never govern the punishment of children. (d) They should never be insulted. (e) One should take care not to accustom children to being whipped, for "it blocks the mind, causes them to learn nothing, and hardens them rather than makes them more tractable." (f) The rod must not be used for minor offenses, which should be corrected by suitable privations or a severe tone and attitude. (g) A few minor misdemeanors should be allowed to pass so that the children will not develop an aversion to school.

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[81] _Ibid_., p. 190.

[82] Anon., _Essai d'une Ecole chrétienne, ou Manière d'instruire chrétiennement les enfants dans les écoles._ Paris, 1724, part VI, chapters XIX and XX. We are following Abbé Allain's excellent summary of these two chapters, _op. cit_., pp. 157-159.

The second of the two chapters instructs teachers in "That Which Must Be Observed in the Punishment of Children." "There are schoolmasters and schoolmistresses," writes the anonymous author, "who have the gift of making themselves feared without having to resort to corporal punishment, simply through their words or a serious and grave demeanor, and who are able to make themselves loved without becoming too familiar or joining in laughter with the children." Such is the ideal, followed by specific recommendations for arriving at it. (a) Pupils should first be warned. (b) Next come punishments designed to humiliate -- making them kneel, assigning them seats in the back of the room, having them learn supplementary lessons. (c) They are then threatened with a whipping, but it goes no further at first than the threat. (d) Every means of punishment must first be exhausted before resorting to the whip, even then it should be used only with much circumspection and moderation so as not to bruise or wound the children. (e) They must be made to understand that they are being punished for their own good, apportioning the punishments and diversifying them according to the nature of the delinquency.

(f) Serious offenses must be dealt with without mercy; liars, thieves, slanderers, hot-heads, backbiters, aggressors, libertines, the insolent, the foul-mouthed, the rebellious, and those who disobey their fathers and mothers shall be severely punished. Stubborn disobedience shall not be pardoned, nor shall repeated and sustained lying, habitual irreverence in church and inveterate laziness. (g) On the other hand, inadvertent errors should be treated with indulgence and minor misdemeanors committed in school should be punished gently. (h) Pupils may be exonerated from punishments they deserve by means of "diligence points" which they may have accumulated.

Similar views on discipline and punishments are found in the Instruction méthodique and in J.B. de la Salle's Conduite des écoles chrétiennes. In the latter work, dating from the end of the 17th century, the famous Christian pedagogue writes that

> In order to be useful to the pupil, the correction must be: 1. pure and disinterested, that is, without any desire for vengeance; 2. charitable, that is, executed in a spirit of veritable charity for the pupil; 3. just; 4. in proportion to the offense; 5. moderate; 6. calm, so that the punisher does not feel moved by anger; 7. prudent; 8. voluntary on the part of the pupil, that is, understood and accepted by him; 9. received with respect; 10. silent on both sides.[83]

Are such methods "brutal and humiliating," as Fourrier, writing in 1964, states?[84] Perhaps. No doubt the answer depends, in part at least, on such diverse factors as la race, le moment, le milieu, on the psychological make-up of the individual pupil and teacher, on a proper understanding (and we are still a good way from having attained it, despite the many advances in the social sciences) of the ultimate effect on human beings as a group of various methods of discipline, on one's idea of what constitutes progress, and, ultimately, as in practically all things involving people, on one's particular system of values.

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[83] Cited by Abbé Allain, op. cit., p. 160.

[84] Fourrier, op. cit., p. 146.

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Teaching methodology in the Little Schools underwent a radical change towards the end of the 17th century. Up to that time, the individual method was used, that is, the teacher, with the help of his student "precentors," attended to each pupil on an individual basis, dividing up his time more or less equally among the several members of the class.[85] Such a method has, of course, serious shortcomings, notably that in a class of say 50 pupils, with three hours a day devoted to reading, each pupil will receive about four minutes of instruction and be idle for two hours and fifty-six minutes. At the end of the century, the individual method began to be replaced by "simultaneous" instruction, that is to say, different levels of reading and writing are established by the teacher, and pupils at the same level are grouped together. La Salle, in his _Conduite des écoles chrétiennes_, proposes that "While one of the pupils reads aloud, all the others in his group will follow along in their books, which they should always have at hand. The teacher will very carefully see to it that everyone is reading softly what the reader is reading aloud, and from time to time he will have others read a few words in order to surprise them and to find out if they are reading properly; if they have not been following, the teacher will impose upon them some penitence or punishment."[86] The same procedure, according to Sister Fracard, was followed in girls' schools: "Reading was taught at different levels; pupils at the same level, grouped around the schoolmistress or the monitor, followed along in the same book."[87]

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[85] Abbé Allain, _op. cit._, p. 155.

When pupils made mistakes while reciting, teachers were advised to be gentle and patient in correcting them. The bishop of Autun, in his regulations of 1685, recommends that teachers "have their pupils recite their lessons without hurrying them..., and if, while reading, they make any mistakes, to correct them gently, without insulting them, striking them or pushing them too harshly."[88]

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What did the children study in the Little Schools? The curriculum appears to have been rather meager, restricted to the three R's, and a good deal of instruction in plain chant, religion, and manners and morals.[89] In addition to these, the Instruction méthodique prescribes "the principles of Latin and Greek for those who are capable of learning them, so that they may be able to enter a good collège and be among the best in their class there."[90] Competition for a place in an "Ivy League" school is apparently not unique to our own times! More seriously, such a statement, in a pedagogical work dating from the end of the 17th century, points, surprisingly, to a certain measure of social mobility in a society generally thought to be rigidly stratified. Latin and Greek for boys who show promise and who might go on to higher education; for girls of the non-privileged classes, however, for whom any higher education was out of question, manual work, consisting mainly of sewing, darning, weaving, knitting and various other kinds of needlework, was almost always made a part of the elementary curriculum. Primary education for such girls was, then, a largely practical matter, suited to their needs and their life-expectations. This notion, in a few isolated places, was carried to the extreme of not permitting girls to learn to write on the grounds that it would be useless to them, would serve only to inflate their egos, and would enable them, according to schoolmistress Magdelaine Adam, who exercised her profession in Doulaincourt from 1765 to 1794, "to write to their boy friends."[91]

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[86] Cited by Abbé Allain, op. cit., p. 156.

[87] Fracard, op. cit., p. 44.

[88] Charmasse, op. cit., p. 31.

[89] Allain, op. cit., pp. 163, 164; Ott, op.cit., p. 5; Charmasse, op. cit., p. 81; Fracard, op. cit., p. 44.

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Religious education, from all accounts, was of course, much stressed in the Little Schools. The bishop of Autun, for example -- and the example is typical -- prescribes the study of the catechism every Wednesday and Saturday, so that the children will learn "their prayers, the mysteries of the Catholic religion, the commandments of God and the Church, and the holy sacraments."[92] He also orders "schoolmasters on the one side, and schoolmistresses on the other side" to assemble their pupils in Church every Sunday and remain close to them "so that they behave themselves properly during High Mass, Vespers and the catechism."[93] Finally, the bishop warns against the reading of certain kinds of books: "Because these Little Schools must serve not only to teach reading and writing, but to train children in piety, we forbid teachers to give them any work which is not useful to this effect, and prohibit the use of books containing wicked stories, novels and similar works prejudicial to salvation."[94]

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[90] Ibid., p. 14.

[91] Fayet, op. cit., p. 15.

Several chapters of the Essai d'une école chrétienne are devoted to the specific details of religious instruction.[95] The unknown author of this pedagogical work of the early 18th century recommends that school children be taught two responses in the catechism every morning, the same number in the afternoon, that they be required to repeat the lesson several times and then review it again during the principal catechisms, conducted twice weekly. During these catechisms it is suggested that the teacher read the text of the lesson, explain it word by word and render it more understandable through the use of homely explanations and historical examples, "taking care to teach children to exercise their judgement more than their memory," and shunning abstractions in favor of making the pupils see the practical side of religious education. Special prescriptions are given to guide the teacher in the instructional methods to be employed with unintelligent and illiterate children, or, as we would put it today, with the slow learners, the underachievers and the culturally deprived. Finally, numerous texts from Holy Scripture have been gathered together here to serve as themes for "homely instruction in Christian morality which schoolmasters and schoolmistresses may give to their boys and girls."

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[92] Charmasse, op. cit., p. 31.

[93] Ibid., p. 28.

[94] Ibid., p. 28.

[95] Part IV, Chapters VI through XXVIII.

Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, in his Conduite des écoles chrétiennes, recommends that lessons in the catechism be given "every day for half an hour, one hour on Wednesdays and the day prior to the beginning of long vacations, and an hour and a half on Sundays and holidays."[96] The author, of L'Instruction méthodique pour l'école paroissiale reports, however, in an interesting sidelight, that parents of schoolchildren in Paris had been complaining of the length of time devoted to the study of the catechism, and that therefore the time schedule had been modified. The last quarter hour of class every afternoon, he tells us, had been consecrated to religious instruction; in addition, according to the orders of Monsieur le Chantre, director of the Little Schools in Paris, every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon of the school year had been given over to the study of the catechism. However, "since parents were complaining that most of their children's time was being spent in the exercise of the catechism, it was deemed appropriate to substitute Sundays for Saturdays."[97] Thus, while it is clear that religious education occupied an important place in the Little Schools, which is of course no more than natural when the school system is governed largely by the clergy, there did exist safeguards against excesses even in this area. The power of parental protest!

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[96] Op. cit., p. 243.

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One of the subjects regularly taught in the Little Schools, and which, to our loss perhaps, is no longer deemed worthy of attention in most of our schools today, was civility, or good manners. No less a personnage than the Venerable de la Salle did not consider it unworthy of himself to compose a work to which he gave the title: Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne. Another widely read book of etiquette, the Instructions familières,[98] was taken from Part IV of the Instruction méthodique pour l'escole paroissiale, to which we have referred several times, and published separately for the use of schoolchildren. The chief object of such books and such instruction was to develop in the pupils feeling of respect for their parents, their teachers, their elders and, in general, all those deserving of respect, by pointing out in concrete detail what one must or must not do in various situations in order to demonstrate such respect. These books also contain numerous rules for propriety and decorum, some of which strike the modern reader as rather quaint and humorous. Here are a few examples of both the quaintly antiquated and the still applicable taken from the Instructions familières:

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[97] P. 113.

[98] Anon., Instructions familières, qui contiennent brièvement dans le premier traité, les maximes et les pratiques fondamentales de la Religion Chrétienne, que l'on doit enseigner aux enfans dans les Ecoles, dans le second traité, les pratiques plus faciles de la Civilité. Extraites de la IV. Partie du Livre de l'Ecole Paroissiale, pour servir de lecture aux enfans dans les Ecoles. Paris, 1688.

> Do not spit out the window, or throw anything dirty in the street, as this may incommodate someone.[99]
>
> When one is seated and someone important arrives or passes in front of us, one must stand up to show him respect, especially when he wishes to speak to us.[100]
>
> In regard to people who are much superior to us, one must not ask in greeting them How they are, except if one is visiting them while they are ill.[101]
>
> Napkins must be used only to wipe one's mouth, or at most, one's fingers, the knife and the fork, but not to rub one's face nor to blow one's nose; neither to clean the plates and the trays nor to rub one's teeth.[102]

Given the behavior of children in contemporary America, it would perhaps not be a bad idea to reinstate lessons in civility in our primary schools.

The bishop of Autun, in his Ordonnances synodales of 1685, also shows a concern for the behavior of schoolchildren, but he is more interested in their morality than their manners. Teachers, he states, should inspire in their pupils an aversion for forbidden games, cabarets, dances, comedies, immodesty in their dress, and too familiar conversation with girls and with profligate boys, "carefully seeing to it that they do not utter any indecent word or sing any indecent songs."[103] Moreover, the bishop reminds the teachers of his diocese that their ministry does not expire on the threshold of the school, but that they "also have an obligation to inform themselves of the conduct of the children outside of school, and, if they learn that they are subject to any vice, to chide them for it."[104]

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[99] pp. 62, 63.

[100] pp. 64, 65.

[101] pp. 73.

[102] p. 86.

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A number of textbooks for use in religious instruction are recommended by the author of the *Instruction méthodique*;[105] a simple listing of these texts will give a fair idea of the content of religious education in the Little Schools. A *Vie des Saints* by Père Ribadeneyra or by Lion, "which is in two volumes, costing one *écu*, or in a larger single volume." The two volumes of *La Fleur des exemples*, "from which the teacher may select stories for his catechisms." *Le Catéchisme du diocèse*, along with a few *abrégés* of the Mysteries of the Faith, of the Confirmation, of the Confession, of the Baptism and of the Communion, "to use when needs be and even to give to the children whenever the teacher judges it appropriate in order to help instruct them." In recommending the *Paradisus puerorum*, "excellent for its stories, of which the teacher should have an ample stock," there is once again an insistence on teaching by example rather than by precept, "for children retain more through the examples of their fellow-creatures than through precepts." Mentioned also are the *Méditations de Saint Bonaventure*, the *Pédagogue chrétien*, *L'Enfant catéchisé* by Père Bonnefons, the *Guide des pécheurs* by Grenade, the *Catéchisme paroissial des fêtes* and the *Catechismé paroissial de la première communion*.

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[103] Charmasse, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] pp. 59, 60.

There also existed a fairly wide choice of texts for the other disciplines taught in the Little Schools, such as the *Croix de par Dieu*, an "alphabet" on the cover of which are depicted the ultimate ends of man; the *Petit latin* and the *Petit français* for teaching Latin and French spelling, the latter being a collection of pious thoughts printed in large Roman letters with the words broken up into syllables; an *Instruction nouvelle pour enseigner aux enfants à connaître le chiffre et à sommer avec les gets*; and a series of texts published by the *Bibliothèque bleue*: the *Grand Alphabet Français et Latin*, the *Nouveau Traité d'Orthographe*, the *Arithmétique à la plume et par gets*, etc. In addition, the *Instruction méthodique* itself contains, for the use of teachers, chapters on methods for teaching reading and writing, as well as advice for explaining the principles of Latin; and for the pupils (also published separately), chapters on French spelling "without knowledge of Latin" and on the principal rules of arithmetic.

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Such were the Little Schools. Under the authority of the Church and, to a considerable extent, religiously oriented, financed by the local community and the tuitions of the pupils, taught by teachers who had received little or no formal training in their profession, widespread but far from universal, rudimentary in their curriculum and varying in quality from community to community, they did nevertheless represent an important step in the direction of free, secular, obligatory and universal primary education, a goal which was not finally to be attained until the 1880's under the Third Republic, long after the Revolution.

CHAPTER II

EDUCATION FOR THE NON-PRIVILEGED CLASSES

B) The Ecoles de Charité

The Little Schools were not the only source of elementary education for girls of the non-privileged classes. Throughout France, and often in the same towns and villages, there existed side by side with the Little Schools a large number of what were known as Ecoles de Charité. These differed from the Little Schools in two important respects: (1) they were taught by sisters belonging to various teaching orders rather than by lay teachers; (2) intended primarily for girls of indigent families, they were entirely free.

"Although the Little Schools," states H.C. Barnard, "were supposed to afford a free education to the children of the poor, they were not of themselves sufficient to supply fully the demands that were made upon them. To supplement the Little Schools, therefore, there arose a demand for Charity Schools, independent of the scholaster, attached to each parish and put in charge of the parish priest... Charity Schools were founded not only by parishes but also by religious orders and by private individuals."[1]

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[1] H.C. Barnard, op. cit., p. 49.

According to Sister Marie-Pierre Fracard, writing specifically about Poitou, the Charity Schools were "completely free establishments, supported by the parishes or benefactors and conforming therefore to the decisions of the Council of Trent, " whereas in the Little Schools, "the teachers received remuneration from the parents of the pupils."[2] Such was the case, as reported by researchers, in community after community throughout France.[3]

Even the upper-class convent schools accepted poor girls without charge as non-resident pupils, the only stipulation being, according to the rules and regulations of the Institute and Society of the Nuns of Saint Ursula, that they had to be "so clean and so neat that the girls of good family have no reason to avoid their company."[4] From this, Sister Fracard deduces that girls from different social backgrounds even attended the same classes, for if this were not so, the regulation would be unnecessary.[5] H.C. Barnard points out the mutual benefits that the children of the wealthy and the children of the poor derived from being brought together in the convent schools: "The daughter of 'people of quality'..., in rubbing shoulders with her less fortunate sisters, must have gained some inkling... of the ultimate insignificance of those class distinctions which bulked so largely in France under the ancien régime. But the daughters of the poor also gained something which the petite ecole could rarely offer them. The cultured and refined companions of Anne's Society [the Ursulines] instilled into their pupils habits of courtesy and consideration, and in all reading lessons the greatest pains were taken to drill the pupils in a proper pronunciation of their mother-tongue.[6]

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[2] Soeur Marie-Pierre Fracard, op. cit., p. 40.

[3] See for example: Abbé Allain, op. cit. pp. 184-198; Albert Babeau, L'Instruction primaire dans les campagnes..., pp. 46-49; Anatole de Charmasse, op. cit., pp. 40-49; Abbé Gillant, op. cit., pp. 12, 13.

[4] Cited by Fracard, op. cit., p. 29.

[5] Ibid.

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Though there existed Charity Schools for the elementary education of impoverished boys, run by priests of the teaching orders founded by Charles Démia and Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, among others, these were far less numerous than the Charity Schools for girls. Beginning about the middle of the seventeenth century, there was a hugh proliferation of female teaching orders, and as the number of nuns swelled, so too did the number of Charity Schools, for their teachers were recruited almost exclusively from the ranks of the teaching orders. This does not mean, however, that fewer poor boys received a primary education than girls. For one thing, boys, almost certainly, attended the Little Schools in far greater numbers than girls, their parents no doubt believing it more worthwhile to spend money to educate their sons than their daughters; and for another, indigent boys had more opportunity to attend the Jesuit-run colleges, which began at the primary level and which accepted the poor as day-students without charge, than girls had to attend the convent schools under the same conditions, for the fact is that there were simply fewer of the convent schools than there were collèges.

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[6] Barnard, op. cit. p. 71.

One of the earliest recorded instances of nuns conducting school for impoverished girls is recorded by Edmond Poupé. From the communal archives of Draguignan, he found that the town council decided, in 1532, to allocate the sum of three florins to several "monjos" (nuns) to lodge them in a house where they were to conduct school.[7] Who these "monjos" were, where they came from, whether or not they belonged to a regular order, are questions to which the archives provide no answer. It was not, however, until about the middle of the seventeenth century that the teaching orders began to proliferate and the Charity Schools to flourish. In the 1792 edition of Helyot's eight volume Histoire des ordres religieux et militaires (Paris), the founding and development of one female teaching order after another, up to the end of the eighteenth century, is described, among them the Ursulines, Les Filles de la Présentation de Notre-Dame, Les Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph, Les Dames de Saint-Lorris, Les Soeurs de la Charité, Les Filles de la Croix, Les Filles de la Providence de Dieu, Les Filles de l'Union Chrétienne, Les Filles de l'Enfance de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, Les Filles de Sainte-Geneviève, Les Frères et les Soeurs des Ecoles Chrétiennes et Charitables du Saint Enfant Jésus, Les Filles de

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[7] Edmond Poupé, op. cit., p. 28.

Notre-Dame, etc. The most widespread orders were no doubt the Ursulines, the Visitandines, Les Filles de la Croix, Les Filles de la Charité and Les Filles de Notre-Dame, which still exist today as teaching orders. In 1792, there were more than 9000 Ursulines established as teachers in Paris and the provinces.[8]

For the most part, these teaching orders, subsisting, and sometimes quite well, on the income from their invested funds, funds brought to the order by each new postulant, were able to pay their own way, with some assistance, occasionally, from the local community in which they established themselves. A rather typical example, except for the unfortunate end, is the group of Ursulines who came to settle in the town of Draguignan in 1620. Originally from Aix, they requested permission from the town council of Draguignan to establish themselves there as teachers on condition only that the town put at their disposal suitable lodgings. The town was only too happy to grant this request and, in the bargain, offered them a subsidy of 600 écus with the stipulation that the buildings they purchased would revert to the community if and when they ceased to occupy them. The Ursulines thereupon purchased three houses and fifteen gardens for a sum total of 4720 pounds, and prospered in Draguignan until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when they fell victim to the financial schemes of Law. No longer able to support themselves by 1750, an edict of the Council of State ordered the suppression of the convent, the property going to Les Soeurs de la Visitation, another teaching order, which had established itself in Draguignan in 1632 and which remained there until the Revolution.[9]

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[8] Alfred des Cilleuls, op. cit., p. 17.

The final chapter in the history of Les Soeurs de la Visitation in Draguignan is also interesting, instructive and not untypical. After the suppression of the religious orders in 1790, the Visitandines continued to reside in their convent, as the law authorised them to do. But at the end of the year 1791, they refused to receive, as chaplain, a priest who had sworn allegiance to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. The Town Council, upset by this, held that since the sisters were engaged in the education of girls, they would have to be considered public servants, and it therefore ordered them to take the civil oath required by the law. The Visitandines formally refused to comply with this order, and instead promised to be "faithful to the law, the nation, and the King." The District Director, apprised of this refusal, declared that it constituted grounds for forbidding the Visitandines to hold school. The Department Director, however, did not share this view. He pointed out that the nuns, "not being paid by the community to give free instruction to girls, could not therefore be classified as civil servants engaged in public education, and that consequently they could not be held to the oath required of people engaged in public education." The dispute was left dangling, however, for at the end of September 1792, in conformity to the law of the previous August, the sisters dispersed and their convent was sold as national property.[10]

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[9] Poupé, op. cit., pp. 28, 29.

Thus, almost every city and town of France, and many of its villages, had its Charity Schools for poor girls, conducted by a multitude of teaching orders, which were self-supporting and therefore imposed little or no burden on the communities in which they had established themselves. To give an idea of how widespread these Charity Schools were, Albert Babeau cites, among others, Les Soeurs de la Charité of Evreux, which maintained, in 1786, eighty-nine establishments, and Les Soeurs de la Charité de l'Instruction Chrétienne of Nevers, which had one hundred and twenty.[11]

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What were the objectives of the teaching orders and the Charity Schools? Pierre Fourier, the founder, in 1597, of Les Filles de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame, stated them in the Constitution of this order, and the statement is quite typical of those found in the constitutions of practically all the other teaching orders.

> These nuns and sisters, often thinking of the necessity of educating the youth, in these dangerous and perverse times, of the importance of carefully training girls at the earliest age, so that they may one day conduct themselves and their families piously, and of the dignity of this function and the rewards that our Lord is preparing for them, these nuns and sisters will make every effort to employ their studies, their diligence and their fidelity in such pursuits, and with the best methods and practices of which they are capable. They shall be required to ac-

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[10] _Ibid._, pp. 31, 32.

[11] Albert Babeau, _La Ville sous l'Ancien Régime_, p. 493.

> cept in their schools any girls of the community who present themselves, without demanding any payment, and shall teach them to read, to write and to do such work as is useful, honest and appropriate for decent girls.[12]

A century and a half later, following an investigation of the schools of the town of Narbonne, it was reported that the Charity School run by the sisters of this same teaching order "is very useful for the education of girls; that they are imbued with the best principles of religion, develop a taste for work, and learn all manner of useful things, so that when they return to their families, they are a joy to them as they are to society as a whole."[13] Thus, the hopes and expectations of the founder were still being fulfilled one hundred and fifty years later, at least in this particular school, and there is little to show that such was not the case in most of the others.

While practically all of the Charity Schools and teaching orders were concerned with the education of girls coming from indigent families of the non-privileged classes, the constitution of at least one such order, Les Filles de Saint-Joseph in Paris, required its members to devote themselves to the instruction of noble or well-born girls who were either orphans or whose families had fallen on hard times, and to give them the kind of education that would enable them to make their way in life. According to Helyot:

> The sisters of this order are presently following the constitution approved by the archbishop of Paris, François de Harlay de Champvalon, in 1691. According to this constitution, they must devote themselves to the daughters of

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[12] Cited by Allain, op. cit., p. 227.

[13] Louis Narbonne, l'Instruction publique à Narbonne avant 1789. Narbonne, 1891, p. 88.

> noble or respectable families, who, being poor or orphaned, have no means to provide themselves with a good education and learn useful work; which is why, in teaching them the principles of Christianity and to read and to write, in training them in the practice of all sortes of virtues, they are also taught all the occupations appropriate to their sex, so that they may, through their work, have some resource against poverty and have an honest occupation throughout their lives.[14]

That the sisters of the teaching orders were respected and considered worthwhile and important additions to the communities where they came to establish themselves, is attested to by a number of reports describing the warm welcomes they received. The religious orders, according to Albert Babeau, especially those engaged in teaching, were often asked by town councils to settle in their communities, the councilors assuring them of a number of privileges and even of subsidies. They were often, indeed, received with a certain pomp. The Visitandines, who were expected in the town of Sisteron, were greeted at the gates of the town by the councilors, the clergy and the officers of the militia, who then conducted them, to the sound of canon, to the cathedral. "However," adds Babeau, "if the greeting accorded them was cordial and sympathetic, the councilors had no intention of allowing them to escape the communal obligations and advised them that they would be taxed on an equal footing with the other citizens."[15] In Draguignan, the Visitandines were solemnly received on the first of July 1632 by the bishop of Frejus and the town councilors amid a great throng of people.[16]

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[14] Helyot, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 438.

[15] Babeau, La Ville, p. 463.

[16] Poupé, op. cit., p. 31.

Louis Narbonne, to cite one more case, tells of the welcome accorded to Les Soeurs de Notre-Dame, in 1644, when they came to settle in the town of Narbonne. "The archbishop received them, upon their arrival, with great displays of joy and with esteem for their virtue and their institution, from which he expected considerable fruits, and he then had them taken to the quarters which had been prepared for them, quarters which were spacious and conveniently situated in one of the handsomest sections of the town."[17] These nuns, adds Narbonne, were mostly young ladies of high birth, ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-two.[18]

The Charity Schools were not, however, universally esteemed, as Charmasse notes. According to this scholar, there were only 15 or 16 such establishments in the old diocese of Autun and, whether the teaching sisters were not sufficiently well-prepared for the work of popular education of whether for some other reason, the diocesan leaders seemed to be unfavorably disposed to their settling there. Charmasse cites to this effect a report following a visit to the parish of Paray, in 1689, by an archpriest who remarked that "the Ursuline nuns are engaged in the teaching of girls, who are not profiting very much from their instruction and who do better under pious women who are engaged in teaching in order to earn money for themselves."[19]

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[17] Narbonne, op. cit. p. 76.

[18] Ibid., p. 78.

[19] Charmasse, op. cit., p. 87.

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On the eve of the Revolution, there were 80,000 nuns in France, "some of whom," writes Armand Ravelet, "prayed and did penance, but most of whom were engaged in teaching and charitable works."[20] In an eloquent letter dated November 7, 1789 and addressed to Mirabeau, the revolutionary orator, a certain Soeur Sainte-Sophie de Carignan, an Ursuline, denouncing the "monachal despotism" of the convent, called for the suppression of religious orders and the liberation of their nuns. At the end of her letter, however, she enters a plea for the preservation of those convents and those orders engaged in the instruction of the youth.[21] Such was not, however, to be the case, and after some 200 years of teaching the daughters of impoverished families how to read, to write, to do simple arithmetic and to perform those tasks that would be most useful to them in their everyday lives, the same fate that fell upon the Vistandines of Draguignan fell upon all the others. For several years thereafter, until the reestablishment of the Church in France under Napoleon, the daughters of the poor were deprived of even the possibility of an education, however elementary and religiously oriented.

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[20] Armand Ravelet, op. cit., p. 61.

[21] Georges Lecocq, Les Congrégations religieuses en 1789. Paris, 1880, pp. 98-103.

CHAPTER III[1]

EDUCATION OF THE ELITE

A) Convent Education

The teaching convents in the 18th century were all more or less beneficiaries of the fame which, in the 17th century, was enjoyed by Saint-Cyr, the prototype of the genre. It had had such glitter, it had been so much talked about, so many girls had spent their youth there and had then gone out into the world, that its organization and its educational system had acquired a universal reputation.[2] But while the 18th century teaching convents continued perhaps to resemble Saint-Cyr in the details of their organization, and, even more, in their pedagogical objectives, the Saint-Cyr of the 18th century, their contemporary, had by now fallen from its former splendor. Though it continued to exist, it was hardly spoken of any more. It no longer had the love of a queen to breathe life into it; it had become no more than a state institution which continued mechanically to raise two hundred and fifty young ladies of the impoverished, largely provincial aristocracy.

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[1] This and the following chapters are based mainly on and translated from de Luppé, Les Jeunes Filles à la fin du XVIII^{e} siècle. Paris, 1925.

[2] See Th. Lavallée, Mme. de Maintenon et la maison de Saint-Cyr, 2nd ed., Paris, 1862.

It had gone out of fashion, for the classes of society which establish what is fashionable were, by definition, excluded from Saint-Cyr, and kings no longer honored it with their patronage. The founder was no longer there to animate it with her genius, to adapt it to changing circumstances. Her precepts and lessons, devised for another age, continued to be too-well learned, and regulations which had been appropriate in 1686 continued to be too faithfully followed. Horace Walpole, who visited Saint-Cyr in 1769, observed:

> All the doors opened before me... A large apartment..., composed of five rooms and destined by Louis XIV for Mme. de Maintenon, now serves as an infirmary; it is full of beds with very clean white curtains, and decorated with all the passages from Holy Scripture which might give one to understand that the founder was a queen. The hour for vespers having arrived, we were taken to the chapel, and I was placed in Mme de Maintenon's gallery... Next, we were taken to each classroom. In the first, the young ladies, who were playing chess, were ordered to sing us the chorus parts from Athalie; in the second, they were made to do minuets and country dances, while a nun, somewhat less talented than Saint Cecile, played the violin. In the others, they repeated for us the proverbs and dialogues which Mme de Maintenon had written for their instruction. For not only was she their founder, but also their saint, and the respects they pay to her memory have completely made them forget the Holy Virgin... We also went to the dispensary, where we were regaled with cordials, while one of the ladies told me that innoculation was a sin because it provided a reason for eating meat on fast days and not going to mass.[3]

Through Walpole's irony, one glimpses the reality: Saint-Cyr in the 18th century was a living corpse, no longer in communication with the outside world. Paris knew it and made light of it, for the opinion of Walpole echoed those of Mme du Deffand and the whole beau monde. Saint-Cyr had fallen from its once glorious eminence and had become no more than a free hotel for impoverished young ladies.

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[3] Letter dated Sept. 17, 1769 from Walpole to J. Montagu in: Madame du Deffand, Correspondance complète de la marquise du Deffand avec ses amis... Paris, 1865, vol. I, pp. 587, 588.

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One of the main differences between Saint-Cyr and the convents of the 18th century was the place occupied in the latter by "lady residents." Most convents had set up rooms and apartments, generally outside the walls of the convent, which were rented to ladies of high society. Some, however, were even made available within the cloister, as for example the apartment in the convent of Saint-Joseph, where before her marriage, Mme de Genlis lived with her mother.[4] This practice was not an innovation of the 18th century; examples of it can be found in previous times, but never had it assumed such commercial proportions.[5] It had become an important source of income for the teaching convents.

In 1765, under the heading: Retraite volontaire. Couvents, monastères et communautés, envisagés comme pouvant servir de retraite à ceux qui veulent vivre retirés du monde, de Jèze[6] describes thirty-six Parisian convents which took in lady residents.

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[4] Mme de Genlis, Mémoires inédits sur le XVIII^e siècle et la Révolution française. Paris, 1857, p. 44.

[5] Mme de Chabrillan, the abbess of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, had an entire building demolished and reconstructed between 1776 and 1780, the building being destined for lady residents. This was meant to be an investment, but, as it turned out in this case, it proved to be a poor one. L. Lambeau, L'Abbaye-aux-Bois de Paris, (1638-1906). Paris, 1906, pp. 264, 265.

[6] [de Jèze], Etat ou tableau de la ville de Paris. Paris, 1765, pp. 373 ff.

Single rooms or even cells could be rented, as well as full apartments, and the ladies could take board along with their lodgings, or bring their own servants and cooks. Prices, therefore, greatly varied. At the Pentemont convent "board is 800 pounds without lodgings; apartments rent from 300 to 1000 per year." At the Visitation convent on the Rue Saint-Jacques, apartments cost from 1000 to 1200 pounds. At the Bernardines on the Rue de Vaugirard "board is 800 pounds. In addition, the services of a maid may be had for 300 pounds. The house has apartments at 300 pounds, 600 pounds and 1000 pounds."[6] The least costly was the convent of the Filles de l'Instruction on the Rue Pot-de-Fer, where board came to only 400 pounds. On the other hand, the marquise de Boussac, in 1770, was paying 3600 pounds for board at the Abbaye-aux-Bois.[7] There were thus facilities to satisfy women of various types and different financial means.

Some of these lodgings were quite expensive. Here, for example, are "two apartments suitable for a widow or an unmarried woman who would like to withdraw to a religious community... One consists of a large bedroom, a parlor, a bathroom, an alcove and a gallery giving onto the church, on the first floor; and a kitchen, a small dining room, two servants' rooms and storage space on the second floor. The other is composed of a foyer, a large bedroom with bath, a parlor, gallery, kitchen, pantry and storage space, all on the same level, on the second floor. The view is very lovely and there is a large garden which may be used by the occupant of the apartment."[8] It is clear that such lodgings were not meant for a simple "retreat." The convent, in the words of Frédéric Masson, had become "a hugh hotel."[9] And it is equally clear, from convent accounts seized during the Revolution, that lady residents were a very profitable affair.[10]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Lambeau, op. cit., p. 265.

This practice, at a time when a woman had no place in the world unless she were married, apparently met a need. In the 18th century, a woman who did not wish to expose herself to backbiting and who was seeking a quiet, comfortable and relatively inexpensive apartment, would simply enter a convent as a lady resident. This deprived her of none of her freedom, hindered her not at all in her comings and goings, nor in the visits she received, and permitted her to maintain her respectability. Convents took in not only widows and spinsters, but also outraged wives: Josephine de Beauharnais withdrew to Pentemont in 1782 and remained there for the fifteen months of the separation trial against her husband.[11] They also took in women whose husbands were away: monsieur de Genlis, leaving for war, brought his young wife to the Abbaye d'Origny-Sainte-

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[8] Abbé Aubert, Annonces, affiches et avis divers. Aug. 30, 1753, p. 538.

[9] Frédéric Masson, Joséphine de Beauharnais (1763-1796). Paris, 1898, p. 147.

[10] At the Abbaye-aux-Bois, in 1778, 47,277 pounds. Perey et Mangras, Histoire d'une grande dame au XVIII^e siecle: la princesse Hélène de Ligne. Paris, 1887, p. 268.

[11] Masson, op. cit., pp. 144 ff.

Benoîte. "I had," wrote Mme de Genlis, "a pretty apartment inside the convent; I had a chambermaid with me; and I had a servant who was housed with the abbess's domestics in the outside lodgings. I ate at the abbess's table, and we ate very well; we were served by two lay sisters. My lunch was brought to me in my room."[12]

Thus, the convent in the 18th century was as much a social as a religious and educational institution. It is rare to find an example such as that of Manon Philipon, who, before deciding to marry, spent three months in the convent of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, where she had received her first communion.[13] This was a true "retreat." Lady residents were one of the characteristic features of convents throughout the 18th century.

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In Paris as in the provinces, there were a great number of convents involved in the education of girls, and parents had a very broad selection to choose among. In his *Etat de Paris*, de Jèze devotes to them a section entitled: *Education qui se paye; pour les filles seulement. Couvent, communautés et maisons religieuses dans lesquelles on met les jeunes personnes en pension pour y être élevées dès le bas âge, ou seulement pour les préparer à faire leur premier communion*. In 1765, forty-three Parisian convents were engaged in the instruction of girls.[14]

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[12] Mme de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits sur le XVIII^{e} siècle et la Révolution française*. Paris, 1857, p. 66.

[13] Mme Roland, *Lettres, nouvelle série (1767-1780)*. Paris, 1913-1915, vol. I, letters XXVII-XXIX.

[14] de Jèze, *op. cit.*, pp. 169 ff.

These convents catered to different classes of society. There were, in effect, three main categories: the provincial convents and, in Paris, first and second class convents. Within these categories, each convent was a living organism, with its own personnel, its own particular organization, and attracting its own special clientele. These differences were largely a function of the prices charged, which varied according to the reputation of the convent, and, within a given convent, according to the amenities afforded the student, for there was usually both a regular and a special _pension_. The most expensive convent was Pentemont, where the regular _pension_ came to 600 pounds a year and the special _pension_, 800. Next came the Abbaye-aux-Bois, where the regular _pension_ was 500 pounds, and 600 for the special. The convent of the Conception on the Rue Saint-Honoré asked 450 or 600. A convent with a very noteworthy clientele, the Madelaine de Traisnel, charged 450 pounds, which seems to be about the average. Some made an additional charge for furniture, heating, etc., or required that such items be furnished by the student.[15] In addition, parents could, if they so desired, procure supplementary lessons for their daughters, given by outside teachers and paid for separately. They could also, by paying extra, provide them with a private room or apartment and servants of their own. Hélène Massalska, having taken ill in 1778 at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, was moved to an apartment and given a personal maid, a chambermaid and a nursemaid, with an authorization to spend the sum of thirty thousand pounds a year for her upkeep.[16]

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[15] _Ibid._

Such examples of extravagance occurred mainly in the two Parisian convents most in vogue in the 18th century, Pentemont and the Abbaye-aux-Bois, which had the most aristocratic and most elegant clienteles.[17] At the abbaye de Pentemont, of the Cîteaux order, one finds such names as Mlles de Montcalm, de Nassau and de Polignac, that is, daughters of the highest nobility. In 1776, Louise d'Esparbès de Lussan, the future Mme de Polastron, was sent there by her father,[18] "everyone who is known having been raised there," in the words of the duchesse de Gontaut,[19] which gives one an idea of the great vogue enjoyed by Pentemont. It was here that Blanche de Kersaint, who later became the duchesse de Duras, was educated.[20] In 1767, Pentemont took in Mademoiselle d'Orléans, of the royal family, and thereby became an extension of the court.[21]

If Pentemont seems to have been the most elegant and the most luxurious of the convents, the Abbaye-aux-Bois, also of the Cîteaux order, while not far behind in this respect, was, physically, an even larger establishment. Moreover, it educated some of the greatest names of the aristocracy: Mlles de Choiseul, de Montmorency,

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[16] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., pp. 27, 28.

[17] L. Lambeau, op. cit., and F. Rousseau, Histoire de l'abbaye de Pentemont. Paris, 1918.

[18] P. Lauzun, Mme. de Polastron. Auch, 1906, pp. 14-16.

[19] Duchesse de Gontaut, Mémoires (1773-1836). Paris, 1909, 4th ed., p. 83.

[20] Bardoux, La Duchesse de Duras. Paris, 1898, p. 46.

[21] Mme de Chastenay, Mémoires (1771-1815). Paris, 1896, vol. I, p. 12.

de Chatillon, de Bourbonne, de Lauraguais, de Caumont, d'Armaillé, de Saint-Chamans, de Lévis, de Nagu, de Chabrillan, d'Aumont, de Talleyrand, de Périgord, de Duras, de Damas, de Conflans.[22]

The world of high finance sent its daughters to the convent of the Conception on the Rue Saint-Honoré or to the Madeleine de Traisnel, which may be counted among the first class establishments. There were still other first class convents, but less fashionable and with a less elegant clientele. The second class convents raised many of the daughters of the petite bourgeoisie, and it seems likely that they had mainly a neighborhood clientele. Such was the convent of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, where Mme Roland received her first communion.[23]

For all of these convents, the education of girls was an important source of income; for many of them, it was their principal *raison d'être*. Not all of them, however, were successful in this respect, and in the case of a few, their financial situation bore no relationship to their reputation. The Abbaye-aux-Bois, for example, despite its great brilliance during the last years of the *ancien régime*, was heavily indebted and was struggling against a difficult financial situation. The reason for this is that its clientele, though very social, was not always very wealthy, and sometimes found itself unable to make payment to the convent. In 1784, the countesse de Turpin sent her daughter to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, but did not regularly pay her fees. The law suit resulting from this had still not been settled at the time of the Revolution.[24]

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[22] Perey and Maugras, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

[23] Mme Roland, *op. cit.*, vol. I, letters XXVII-XXIX.

There were in addition, numerous provincial convents which took in students, generally the daughters of families in the immediate environs. The most famous of the provincial convents, different from almost all the others because of its "national representation," was no doubt Fontevrault, where, between 1738 and 1750, the daughters of Louis XV were raised.[25] The marquise de Ferrières, around 1758, found "this establishment as big as a small town, superbly constructed and very opulent."[26]

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The convents were indeed veritable little towns, for large buildings were required to house a population that was sometimes quite considerable. If, in 1753, Pentemont had only twenty-two professed sisters and twelve lay sisters,[27] and in 1789, six ladies residing in spacious apartments, twelve in single rooms and seventeen students,[28] the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, the modest convent of Manon Philipon, had thirty to forty students in 1765 and, in 1790, twenty-three nuns and seven lay sisters.[29] The Abbaye-aux-Bois, which, in Paris, seems to have been the largest of these little towns, included within its walls, in 1778, seventy-three nuns, one hundred and four lay sisters, one hundred and seventy-seven students, eight novices and four directors.[30] But the number of nuns, which varied considerably from convent to convent and from one date to another, was generally from twenty to forty in the Parisian establishments, circa 1765.[31] The provincial convents were, ordinarily, more spacious and more populated. Around 1750, Fontevrault, one of the largest provincial abbeys, had ninety-six nuns and thirty-six lay sisters, "not counting a very large number of servants."[32] In 1764, the abbaye d'Origny-Sainte-Benoîte had no fewer than one hundred nuns.[33]

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[24] L. Lambeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 265, 266.

[25] See H. Chérot, *Les Filles de Louis XV à Fontevrault*. Paris, 1899.

[26] Marquise de Ferrieres-Marsay, *Souvenir en forme de mémoires (1744-1837)*. Saint-Briene, 1910, p. 13.

[27] F. Rousseau, *Histoire de l'abbaye de Pentemont*. Paris, 1918, p.28.

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43. There must have been more, however, prior to 1789.

The various convents followed the regulations, more or less modified, of their founders. The more menial tasks fell to the lay sisters, who were, however, permitted to go outside the cloister. As for the professed sisters, the ceremony of the taking of the habit took place after serving first as a postulant, then as a novice. For example, at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, in 1765, one was a postulant for six months and a novice for a year, and these were the usual lengths of time required of candidates in the different orders.[34]

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[29] Mme Roland, op. cit., vol. I, letters XXVII-XXIX.

[30] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., pp. 460, 461.

[31] de Jèze, op. cit., pp. 281-298.

[32] Marquise de Ferrières, op. cit., p. 13.

[33] Mme de Genlis, op. cit., p. 65.

[34] de Jèze, op. cit., pp. 281-286.

Finally, the nuns would receive from their parents doweries which, according to the convent, went from two thousand to eight thousand, and even ten thousand, pounds. This is the reason that sister Sainte-Agathe, a friend of Manon Philipon, despite her intelligence, remained a lay sister, for she could furnish no dowery.[35] Sometimes, however, in cases where doweries were insufficient or non-existant, consideration was given to the person's merit, to her family's other obligations, or, as at Pentemont, "to the young lady's birth."[36] At Pentemont, the abbesses and nuns, were, generally, of the old nobility. At the Abbaye-aux-Bois, many of the nuns belonged to the most important families of France. In 1778, during the stay there of Hélène Massalska, the abbess was a Chabrillan, and she had taken the place of a Richelieu. The nun in charge of education was a Rochechouart, and her sister was also there.[37] Certain of these aristocratic nuns retained some rather un-Christian prejudices, such as Mme de Torcy at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. "We used to make fun of her high and mightly ways," wrote Hélène Massalska. "We used to say that the only reason she had become a nun was that the only husband she had found worthy of her was Jesus Christ, and that even at that, she wasn't quite sure she hadn't married beneath herself."[38]

The nuns in the other convents came mainly from the upper or lower middle class, as did their clientele. Generally, they had been students at the convent where later they were to embrace the religious life. Moreover, they would often influence their relatives to come there. Of course, nuns of a different social class would sometimes slip in, but in the most aristocratic or the most humble convents, teachers and students belonged largely to the same class of society, which is one of the characteristic features of this type of education in the 18th century.

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[35] Mme Roland, *op. cit.*, vol. I, letters XXVII-XXIX.

[36] de Jèze, *op. cit.*, pp. 281-286.

[37] Perey and Maugras, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

The kind of life the nuns led depended upon the austerity of the order to which they belonged, and more especially, upon the strictness with which the rules were applied. Mme de Genlis and her mother lived for awhile at the convent of the Filles du Précieux-Sang on the Rue Cassette. "I developed at the Précieux-Sang," she writes, "a great veneration for the nuns of the most austere orders (the ones here lived according to the rules and practiced all the austerities of the Carmelites), as well as for the perfectness of their piety and their saintliness, which surpass anything I can say about them... No little cliques here, no enviousness, no gossip."[39] Later, after her marriage, she spent some time at the abbaye d'Origny-Sainte-Benoîte. "The simplicity and piety of those nuns often reminded me of my angelic nuns of the Rue Cassette. They were, however, much less perfect. The same faith, the same candor, the same taste for work, but not the same closeness."[40] There were thus variations according to the order, the abbess and the turn of mind of the nuns, in close correlation with their origins.

Each nun had a cell of her own. At Pentemont, four of these cells could still be seen in 1910. Each was composed of a "little room with a fireplace, a window looking out on the central courtyard, an alcove, a modest storage room situated behind the alcove, and a small foyer opening onto a miniature gallery."[41] At Origny-Sainte-Benoîte "every nun had a pretty cell and a pretty little garden all of her own within the huge enclosure of the common garden."[42] At the Abbaye-aux-Bois each cell contained "a bed, white in summer, blue in the winter, a prie-Dieu, a dresser, chairs done in woven straw, a well-waxed floor, slippers for walking, a table and shelves for keeping books. The cells could be decorated with pictures, reliquaries, etc."[43] The lodgings of the abbesses were more sumptuous. At the Abbaye-aux-Bois, the abbess's quarters were composed of a "large bedroom, two salons, a very large dining room, two antichambers, two small rooms, two parlors, a galery and lodgings for the abbess's entire retinue."[44] She took her meals in her apartment, while the nuns ate in the refectory. All this does not give one the impression of any great disdain for the things of this world, and, except for their attendance at night services, the nuns in the great convents do not seem to have been subjected to terribly harsh austerities. Mme Sainte-Delphine, the sister of Mme de Rochechouart, the abbess of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, was not in the habit of rising until after eight-thirty; when this was mentioned to her, she replied. "that she had not taken a vow not to get all the sleep she pleased."[45]

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[39] Mme de Genlis, op. cit., pp. 43, 44. The Carmelites were not engaged in teaching, but they took in lady residents.

[40] Ibid., p. 66.

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[41] Procès-verbaux de la Commission municipale de Vieux-Paris, 1910, p. 84.

[42] Mme de Genlis, op. cit., p. 66.

[43] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 457.

[44] Ibid., p. 460.

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Hélène Massalska has left us with several thumb-nail sketches of her classmates at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. "Mlle. de Châtillon, nicknamed Tâtillon, fourteen, serious, pedantic, very pretty, but a little heavy... Mlle. de Mura, called la Précieuse, eighteen, pretty, beautiful even, intelligent, likable, but a little pretentious... Mlle. de Manicamp, ugly, good, very intelligent, violent, excitable." [46] And further on: "Mlle. d'Armaillé, fouteen, hideous, simpering, but a good creature... Mlle. de Civrac, nineteen, a noble face, but subject to spasms and a little crazy."[47] "Mlle. de Barbantane, fifteen, looks like a boy, very naughty, pretty, very good dancer... Cosse was only twelve, ugly, but full of grace and very delicate."[48] "Mlle. de Montsauge, the most beautiful eyes in the world, but dark-complexioned, gentle, intelligent, fifteen."[49]

Thus, there was a wide range in ages. Girls sometimes came to the convent very young, sometimes not until eleven or twelve for the specific purpose of preparing for their first communion, in which case they remained only a year or two. Mme Roland, for example, had remained at home until the age of eleven, at which time she herself requested a retreat at a convent in preparation for her first communion. The Congrégation de Notre-Dame was recommended to her parents and they thereupon obtained further information about it. "It turned out... that the establishment was respectable, the order not very austere; the nuns, consequently, were said to display none of those excesses, none of those mummeries which characterize most of their kind."[50] Hélène Massalska was only eight when her uncle put her in the Abbaye-aux-Bois.[51] Others were even younger: Henriette d'Aguesseau entered the convent at the age of three.[52] Many remained in their convents until they married.

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[45] _Ibid._, p. 126.

[46] _Ibid._, pp. 100, 101.

[47] _Ibid._, pp. 115, 116.

[48] _Ibid._, pp. 120, 121.

[49] _Ibid._, p. 166.

It was of course impossible to bring together girls of such dissimilar ages and to teach them different things at the same time. Thus, they were divided into classes according to age, but the divisions covered a much wider range than they do today. This was made possible by the flexibility of the curricula, the vagueness of the subjects taught and the complete absence of examinations. Moreover, they still seemed largely unaware in the 18th century that relatively small classes are one of the essential conditions for obtaining good scholastic results.[53] At Saint-Cyr, which served as a model for the others, the two hundred and fifty girls were divided into only four classes: the red class, composed of fifty-six girls under ten years of age; the green class, fifty-six girls from eleven to thirteen; the yellow class, sixty-two girls from fourteen to sixteen; the blue class, seventy-six girls from seventeen to twenty. Since some of the students in the upper classes served as monitors, and since there were usually a few girls from each class confined to the infirmary at any given moment, each division had, therefore, about fifty students. In the great convents of the 18th century, the classes were, generally, almost as large. At the Congrégation de Notre-Dame in 1765, there were thirty to forty students "gathered in a single class from the age of six up to seventeen or eighteen, but divided into two tables, that is, into two sections."[54] At the Abbaye-aux-Bois, the one hundred and seventy-seven students were, in 1778, divided into four sections. Children of five to seven, the first section, were not, however, taught as a class, but were put in the care of young nuns. Then came the three other classes, differentiated, as at Saint-Cyr, by colored ribbons on the same black uniforms worn by girls of all the classes. From seven to ten, the blue class. One was then promoted to the white class, the class of the first communion. Then, at about twelve, one went into the red class.[55] Thus, there were about forty students per section.

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[50] Mme Roland, Mémoires, Paris, 1905, vol. II, pp. 39, 40.

[51] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 18.

[52] Mme de Lasteyrie, Vie de Mme de La Fayette, avec une notice sur la vie de la duchesse d'Ayen, sa mère. Paris, 1868, pp. 2-4.

[53] The regulations of the Ursulines did, however, set a maximum limit of eighteen to twenty students per class. Règlement des religieuses Ursulines de la congrégation de Paris. Paris, 1705, p. 4.

Such, at any rate, was the case for convents which maintained classes and which were equipped to offer instruction. However, as Mme de Genlis informs us, this was not always so. "...in general, simple convents have no classes. The girls are in private rooms, under the guidance of governesses, and the nuns play no part whatsoever in their education."[56] But this appears to have been the case only in certain small provincial convents, and was rather rare. "All our towns and cities," one reads in the Année littéraire, "are full of pensions and schools for young ladies. There is scarcely a convent which does not take in girls to educate them; many of these convents, in fact, were founded for no other reason than this."[57] The great Parisian and provincial convents were indeed, not merely hotels for lady residents or cloisters for women who had embraced the religious life, but, by and large, veritable boarding schools for young ladies of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

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[54] Mme Roland, Mémoires, vol. II, p. 41.

[55] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., pp. 23, 65, 96.

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The abbess, who was of course in overall charge of the convent, did not, however, intervene directly in the instructional aspects. She would delegate her authority in this area to the nun of her choice, who was usually called, as at Saint-Cyr, the maîtresse générale des classes.[58] The latter also had very little to do, however, with teaching. Her role corresponded to that of a general supervisor, concerned much more with questions of discipline than with those of instruction. Each class was under the direction of a nun-teacher, who was aided by assistant nun-teachers and lay sisters, the latter numbering three and fifteen, respectively, for the blue class at the Abbaye-aux-Bois.[59] But in general, even these nuns were no more than monitors and coaches, the classes being conducted by teachers who came from outside the establishment, which is one of the characteristic features of the 18th century teaching convent.[60] At Saint-Cyr, especially in the early days, such was not the case, and the nuns, chosen and trained by Mme de Maintenon, were true teachers who conducted their classes with no outside help. At the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, as at the Abbaye-aux-Boix and Pentemont, except perhaps for the youngest pupils, classes were given by outside teachers. When Mme Roland, was there, the drawing teacher, a woman, was allowed to penetrate the cloister, while the music teacher, a man, gave his lessons in the parlor "under the inspection of a nun."[61] At the Abbaye-aux-Bois, only natural history and botany were taught by nuns.[62] On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, outside teachers would come to give their courses, which the sisters would review with the students on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. In order to do so with maximum effect, they would sit in on the classes themselves.[63] It was usually men, those actors who not long before had been excommunicated for practicing their profession, who came to the convents to give dancing lessons (Dauberval of the Opéra) and elocution lessons (Molé and Larrivée of the Comédie Française).[64]

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[56] Mme de Genlis, Discours sur la suppression des couvents des religieuses et l'éducation publique des femmes. Paris, 1790, p.3.

[57] L'Année littéraire. 1781, vol. V, p. 254.

[58] Règlement des Ursulines de Paris, op. cit., p. 16.

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[59] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 25.

[60] [N. Adam], Essai en forme de mémoire sur l'education de la jeunesse. Paris, 1787, p. 15.

[61] Mme Roland, Mémoires, vol. II, p. 43.

[62] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 166.

[63] Ibid., p. 24.

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The apportionment of time in the convents was carefully regulated. Here, for example, is the daily schedule of the blue class at the Abbaye-aux-Bois:

> Arise at seven o'clock in summer and at seven-thirty in winter. Be at one's place in class at eight, to await Mme de Rochechouart who arrives at eight o'clock. After she leaves, learn one's Catéchisme de Montpellier and repeat it by heart. At nine, breakfast; at nine-thirty, mass. At ten, read until eleven. From eleven to eleven-thirty, music lesson; from eleven-thirty to noon, drawing. From noon to one o'clock, geography and history. At one o'clock, lunch and recreation until three. At three, writing and arithmetic lessons until four. From four to five, dancing lessons. Snack and recreation until six. At seven, dinner. To bed at nine-thirty.[65]

This schedule, as may be seen, took into account the smallest details and alternated academic subjects with the so-called arts d'agrément. The schedule adhered to by the Ursulines in 1705 was not much different:

> Arise at five-thirty or six in summer, at six-thirty or later in winter. Prayers at seven-fifteen, mass at seven-thirty. Classes from eight to ten, followed by lunch with reading. Recreation. Classes from twelve-fifteen to two. At two, vespers and lunch. Classes from three to four. At five, catechism followed by dinner. Recreation until a quarter to seven or seven. To bed at eight.[66]

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[64] Ibid., p. 55 & p. 58.

[65] Ibid., pp. 23, 24.

[66] Règlement des Ursulines de Paris, op. cit., pp. 110-115.

While this schedule was more rigorous, it no doubt became easier as the century progressed.

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The students' religious sentiments varied from convent to convent and from girl to girl, but it seems, in general, that they came mainly from within themselves, with the nuns playing only a small role in creating and developing them; the girls brought with them to the convents their own dispositions and temperments. Manon Philipon, for example, was going through a period of religious exaltation at the time she insisted upon being sent to a convent to prepare for her first communion. "I was obeying the voice of God, and I crossed the threshold of the cloister offering Him with tears the greatest sacrifice I could make for Him... How can I describe the gentle emotions of a young heart, sensitive and tender, greedy for happiness, beginning to feel the stirrings of nature, and perceiving only the Divinity?"[67] She was eleven at the time; nine years later, around 1774, she had lost all her girlhood faith. Mlle. Bernard, who was later to become Mme Récamier, raised at the convent of La Déserte in Lyons, retained nothing more from her stay there than the lingering memory of a somewhat sensual mysticism, "a vague and gentle dream, with its clouds of incense, its infinite ceremonies, its processions in the gardens, its chants and its flowers."[68] Mlle. De Grouchy, the future wife of Condorcet, was sent to the convent of Neuville-en-Bresse, where she led a rather frivolous life; after twenty months of this, she returned home to her parents, having lost her faith.[69]

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[67] Mme Roland, Mémoires, vol. II, pp. 40, 41.

[68] Herriot, Mme Récamier. Paris, 1904, vol. I, p. 4.

In the great Parisian convents too, the nuns were not always able to lead the souls confided to them along the road to piety. In 1769, Mme du Deffand wrote to Walpole: "In regard to [Mrs. Cholmondelay's] daughters, the younger will remain in the convent, but the older is going to leave shortly to go to another. She let slip out that the sign of the cross was a superstition; the whole convent was aroused and they no longer want to keep her there."[70] Hélène Massalska hardly ever speaks of religion, and on the rare occasions when she does so, it is without enthusiasm or any real feelings of piety. Her first communion seems to have struck her mainly because of her "white dress, threaded with silver," which she liked more than her black uniform.[71] Never does she express any truly religious sentiment, never any spiritual reflections, nor even any serious thoughts. She must have been very much the person she described herself as when she first entered the Abbaye-aux-Bois: "Pretty, intelligent, graceful, shapely, stubborn as a mule, and completely incapable of exercising the least control over herself."[72] The other students no doubt resembled her in many respects. They were not even in the habit of making a show of deference to their religion or its ministers. The confessors were apparently neither very much respected nor very well listened to. There were four at the Abbaye-aux-Bois: dom Giron, twenty-six, who confessed the lay sisters; dom Constance, thirty-one, who confessed the abbess and the older nuns; dom Thémines, forty, confessor to the students; and dom Rigoley de Juvigny, sixty-two, confessor to the novices and the younger nuns.[73] One day, dom Rigoley, "having come to confess a nun, happened to be in the cloister at the time the class was coming from mass; thus, he passed in review all the students and was made a butt of all their gibes. If it had been dom Thémines, our own confessor, we would not have permitted ourselves all those jokes, but we saw nothing wrong with having some fun at the expense of the nuns' confessor."[74] In a convent and just coming from mass, students making fun of a sixty-two year old priest does not say very much for the discipline or the religious spirit of that convent. They were, to be sure, spoiled little girls; moreover, they brought to the convent the irreligious ways which were fashionable at that time in the society in which they had been brought up.

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[69] A. Guillois, La Marquise de Condorcet, sa famille, son salon, ses amis. Paris, 1897, pp. 27-64.

[70] Marquise du Deffand, Lettres de la marquise du Deffand à H. Walpole (1766-1780). London, 1912, vol. I, p. 566.

[71] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 96.

[72] Ibid., p. 166.

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According to the 1705 regulations of the Ursulines, the students were not permitted to leave the convents on Sundays or holidays, and were never to spend the night outside its walls. They were permitted to lunch or dine in town, but only rarely.[75] While vacations were almost non-existant at the teaching convents of the 18th century, and even, indeed, considered dangerous,[76] mothers would come as often as four or five times a week, during the social season, to fetch their daughters and take them to balls and other social events.[77] There were also theatrical productions outside the convents, with students playing parts in them and with their parents and others as onlookers. When Hélène Massalska was still in the blue class, that is, under ten years of age, she played the role of Joas in Racine's Athalie in the home of the duchess de Mortemart; there had been numerous rehearsals under the direction of Molé, of the Comédie Française.[78]

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[73] _Ibid._, p. 461.

[74] _Ibid._, p. 77.

Within the convents themselves, there existed a decidedly mundane life. When Hélène Massalska entered the Abbaye-aux-Bois, she had to offer her classmates a "welcome," which cost her twenty-five louis and consisted of a tea, with ice cream being served to all the students.[79] Around 1760, at the Port-Royal convent, the former rigor of which had eased considerably, the girls, "among themselves, played at being grown-up ladies, and the outside world and its ways occupied all their thoughts."[80] The students were perfectly aware of the hierarchy which existed among the various convents. Once, for example, the wall which separated the Abbaye-aux-Bois from the convent of the Petites-Cordelières developed a breach. "This convent," recounts Hélène Massalska, "was neither as large nor as attractive as ours. It had in all about thirty students, but they were not the kind of girls one would care to know; they were very embarrassed when they saw our class, so large and composed of the noblest young ladies of France."[81]

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[75] Op. cit., p. 14.

[76] Mme de Genlis, De l'Emploi du temps. Paris, 1824, p. 16. Though the book was published in 1824, the ideas belong to the time of her youth.

[77] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 56.

[78] Ibid., pp. 57, 58.

[79] Ibid., pp. 22, 23.

[80] Mme de Chastenay, op. cit., vol. I, p. 11.

There was much dancing in the convents. At Origny-Sainte-Benoîte, for example: "Throughout the whole carnival," wrote Mme de Genlis," I gave balls, with the permission of the abbess, twice a week... My dancers were the nuns and the students; the former took the part of men, and the others of ladies."[82] Mme Roland has left us an account of a small dance in her modest little convent, a dance that was pleasantly enlivened by the unexpected arrival of a man, a doctor. And of course there was dancing at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. During the carnival season, various festivities took place in the convent itself: "That day, we were not required to wear our uniforms, and each mother took great pains in dressing up her daughter; we had very elegant ball gowns. During these days, there came to the convent many women of the world, and especially young women, who... preferred these balls to those of the world, because here they were not always obliged to sit next to their mothers-in-law."[84] There were also theatrical productions, the Abbaye-aux-Bois having in the rear of its gardens a theater which was "very pretty and with many beautiful sets."[85] Here, Hélène Massalska played the role of Amour in *Orphée et Eurydice*; she also played in *Polyeucte*, *Le Cid* and *La Mort de Pompée*. There was an especially elaborate production of *Esther* for the birthday of Mme de Mortemart, in which Hélène played the leading role. "Our costumes were fashioned after those of the Comédie Française. I had a silver and white gown, the skirt of which was all studded with diamonds from top to bottom; they must have been worth more than a hundred thousand écus, for I had all those of Mmes de Mortemart, de Gramont and of the duchess de Choiseul... I had a cloak of pale blue velvet and a gold crown. All the students in the chorus had white muslin gowns and veils."[86]

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[81] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 142.

[82] *Mémoires*, p. 69.

[83] *Mémoires*, pp. 85, 86.

[84] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., pp. 102, 103.

Thus, one can form an idea of the opulence of these productions and of the mundane activities which took place within the walls of the convents themselves. Of course, all the convents were not like the Abbaye-aux-Bois. However, roughly the same atmosphere has been observed in two other, and quite different, convents, Origny-Sainte-Benoîte and the Congrégation de Notre-Dame. It can be assumed, therefore, that this was a more or less general practice.

These young ladies, who, in their convents, were being initiated into the worldly life and the place they would later occupy in society, were also, by a rather curious contrast, being trained in the more humble tasks of domestic life. After the balls and the carnivals and the plays, the students of the red class at the Abbaye-aux-Bois would put away their elegant gowns, would don once again their severe black uniforms and, while continuing their formal instruction, would spend several hours a day helping the nuns in their obédiences, that is, in the different chores which had to be accomplished in the convent. Thus, Hélène Massalska worked successively in the dispensary, the abbacy, the secretary's office, the refectory, and the library. Mlle. de La Roche-Aymon worked in the laundry, Mlle d'Aiguillon repaired chasubles, Mlle. de Vogüé helped in the kitchen, Mlles. d'Uzes and de Boulainvilliers in sweeping up the dormitories. One of the tasks of the Mlles. d' Harcourt, de Rohan and de Galard was to light the lamps.[87] These chores which they were required to perform in their convents, constituted a sort of apprenticeship for the role they would later play as wives, mothers, and homemakers.

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[85] *Ibid.*, p. 460.

[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 119.

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Throughout the entire ancien regime, the teaching convents had no competition to speak of. There seem to have been very few lay boarding schools. In the second half of the 18th century, the existence of two or three such schools is indicated by prospectuses appearing in magazines of the times, for example, the establishments of Mme Escambourt[88] and of Mme de La Fortelle.[89] But as far as can be determined, they attracted very few students, and in any case, were never fashionable. It was not until the Revolution, after the suppression of the convents, that lay boarding schools for girls assumed a growing importance.

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[87] Ibid., pp. 97 ff.

[88] Année littéraire, 1775, vol. I, pp. 272-276.

[89] Journal d'éducation, June, 1776.

Perhaps the outstanding characteristic of the convent schools was their realism; that is, they provided the young ladies of the upper classes with the kind of education and training which would be most useful to them in the roles they would later play in society. This characteristic of convent education owed itself no doubt, in large measure, to the fact that the nuns belonged generally to the same social milieu as their students, and were therefore attuned to their needs, were aware of the kind of life that awaited them, and were in sympathy with it. The teaching convents cannot in any sense be looked upon as a liberalizing influence on the daughters of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy who attended them.

What exactly did these young ladies learn, what subjects did they take, what books did they read, what knowledge did they acquire? This aspect of their education, touched upon only lightly in the present chapter, will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter, where what they studied in the convents will be contrasted with what others studied under private tutelage in their homes; for while the great majority of upper-class girls no doubt received their education in convent schools, private education at home, especially in the latter half of the century, enjoyed something of a vogue, and a significant number of parents, shunning the convents, chose to provide for their daughters' instruction within the confines of their own homes.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION OF THE ELITE

B) Their Studies

The enthusiasm for science, for experimentation, for new ideas and for knowledge in general, which was one of the dominant characteristics of the 18th century, reflected itself in a growing desire among women for learning of every sort, and a corresponding willingness on the part of men to allow them, within limits, to satisfy this desire. Though history has always had its exalted feminists, its dilettante _femmes savantes_, and its truly learned women as well, at no time and in no place, it is safe to say, was the education of women more discussed, more encouraged and more widespread than in 18th century France. The women of the times were themselves aware of this, and in 1757, a lady took it upon herself to address a letter to this effect to Fréron, the editor of the _Année littéraire_:

> Admit, sir, that now that taste has been undergoing a reform and that writers have been endeavoring to make the sciences more palatable to us, we have been making much progress in learning them. Men of genius have initiated us into the mysteries of philosophy; others, more clever still, have strewn with flowers the most abstract studies. Is there any woman in Paris, perhaps even in the provinces, who is not reading with delight treatises on geometry, algebra and especially metaphysics, that admirable metaphysics so much in evidence in our historical writings, in sermons, in novels and even, nowadays, in comedies?... Finally, we now find on our dressing tables, instead of those novels of gallantry which only served to corrupt us, profound thoughts on art, on the interpretations of nature, on commerce, on the workings

> of empires, etc., etc. Will the labyrinth of scholarship be the only area left, sir, which we shall not be permitted to enter?[1]

While this letter may very well have been concocted by Fréron himself, as yet another of his frequent satirical attacks on the philosophes, as I strongly suspect it was, it nevertheless, in a backhanded way, points to a strong interest among women in learning. In 1785, the Journal Encyclopédique, more tersely and with no trace of satire, notes the same phenomenon: "Nowadays, when knowledge is more universally distributed, society demands that women be better educated than they were in former times, and in fact they are."[2]

This enthusiasm found concrete expression in the great number of manuals, treatises, complete courses of instruction and textbooks which were produced during the period. It also found expression in public lectures, a phenomenon which enjoyed enormous popularity in the second half of the century. While this worldly form of instruction no doubt lowered the level of the sciences taught, it can be said in its favor that it helped popularize them at a time when the general public still knew very little about science. In any case, public lectures had a great success -- the magazines of the period are full of prospectuses for them -- and soon young ladies and older women were spending their afternoons listening to talks on physics and natural history. For the sciences, and especially the experimental sciences, were the chief beneficiaries of this craze.

Nourished and sustained by the literary salons, this intense interest in learning had a distinctly worldly flavor, and the convents, therefore, were hardly affected by it. For if worldliness played a part in convent life, it did so in respect to extra-curricular activities rather than to the studies themselves. Old classroom routines do not change from one day to the next, and there is no evidence that course content, methodology or curriculums in the convents underwent any transformation from the beginning of the century to the end. It was mainly the young women who received their education at home who profited from the new spirit.

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[1] 1757, vol. V, p. 90.

[2] February 15, 1785, p. 171.

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French grammar and spelling were, of course, taught both at home and in the convents, but not, apparently, as well as they should have been, especially in the convents. According to the chevalier de Rutledge, in his journal, the *Babillard*, "a respectable woman almost always knows how to dance as she ought to know how to write, and most write only as well as decorum requires that they know how to dance."[3] This would seem to be confirmed by the example of Mme Geoffrin, who, in 1756, at the age of fifty, jotted down in a notebook the address of a certain *sieur* Roger, "to learn how to read and write correctly."[4] Mme Campan informs us that Mme Louise, a daughter of Louis XV and a student at the Fontevrault convent, was still unable to read at the age of twelve.[5] Manon Philipon and Sophie Cannet, in 1766, while they were at the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, had such a strange way of spelling, even at a time when spelling had not yet been completely regularized, that it does no credit to their teachers.[6] At the convent of Cazeaux, in Lyons, Mlle. Boirayon maintained this tradition.[7] An exception was the instruction received by the daughters of Mme de Monthulé; around 1770, "the two girls had a teacher who taught them history, geography, arithmetic, Italian and, with even greater care, the rules of French grammar, making them practice their writing every day."[8] It should be noted that these girls were educated at home.

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[3] July 10, 1778, vol. II, no. XXXVIII.

[4] Marquise de Ségur, *Le Royaume de la rue Saint-Honoré: Mme Geoffrin et sa fille*. Paris, 1897, p. 102.

[5] Mme Campan, *Mémoires sur la vie privée de Marie-Antoinette*... Paris, 1826, 5th ed., vol. I, p. 13.

In regard to the classical languages, they do not seem to have been taught at all in the convents,[9] and only rarely at home. Manon Philipon, for example, had acquired the rudiments of Latin, and Mlle de Chastenay, together with her brother, took Latin lessons from Abbé Boucly, a teacher at the du Plessis *collège*. The rarity of this, however, is attested to by the fact that when the principal of the Sainte-Barbe *collège*, together with the supervisor of studies, came one day to find out what the two people were learning, Mlle. de Chastenay observed that, "a young lady studying Latin was for them a novelty, and it gave them a pleasant surprise."[10]

No examples have been found, either in convents or at home, of girls studying philosophy or theology in any systematic way, that is, with the use of textbooks or manuals; a few, however, did read some philosophic works haphazardly.

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[6] Mme Roland, *Mémoires*, vol. II, pp. 419, 420.

[7] In letters to her mother in 1770, published by Abbé Mollière, "Le Dossier d'une pensionnaire de l'abbaye de Chezeaux." *Bulletin historique du diocèse de Lyon*, 1922, pp. 51-56.

[8] Marmontel, *Mémoires d'un père pour servir à l'instruction de ses enfants*. Paris, 1891, vol. II, p. 202.

[9] Neither Manon Philipon nor Hélène Massalska, students in two typical convents, speaks of them in any way as to suggest they were taught there. Manon Philipon learned what Latin she knew at home.

[10] *Mémoires*, vol. I, p. 41.

History and geography, on the other hand, were two of the basic subjects taught in both convent and home education, and there were numerous manuals and textbooks for both. Mlle. de Chastenay, for example, used Père d'Orléans's *Révolutions d'Angleterre* for the study of English history and Abbé de Vertot's *Révolutions romaines* for the study of Roman history.[11] Ancient history was also studied in a widely read work by the scholar Rollin, or in its abridgement by Abbé Tainé. Mythology was another subject frequently studied.[12] In general, however, it seems that the study of history consisted mainly of memorizing important dates and learning about the lives of great men, with little or no consideration given to the more impersonal forces which shape history. Hélène Massalska claims, however, that she had a very good knowledge of ancient history and the history of France at the age of ten (!), which, if true, is a credit to the teachers at her convent.[13]

Until about 1750, according to Abbé Sicard, mainly Spanish and Italian were taught in the *collèges*, and after that date, mainly German and English.[14] This also seems to have been the case for girls, at least in home education, where the study of modern foreign languages was quite common; in the convents, on the other hand, there is no indication that such languages were studied at all.

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[12] *Ibid.* Also: Perey and Maugras, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[13] Perey and Maugras, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[14] *Les Etudes classiques avant la Révolution*, Paris, 1887, pp. 161-165.

The study of philosophy, of religious history, of the history of literature, whether classical, French, English or whatever, was not engaged in, either at home or in the convents, in any systematic way. At the age of ten, Hélène Massalska "knew by heart the whole poem, La Religion; Les Fables by La Fontaine; two cantos of La Henriade, and the whole tragedy, Athalie."[15] In addition to these works, she and other convent students, probably read such things as Esther, Télémaque, the lives of saints and a few other edifying or innocuous books. But this can hardly be considered a structured or very extensive reading program. At home, reading was more extensive, but still totally unstructured. Manon Philipon, for example, read a great deal, but with little advice, little discernment and no overall design. In her Mémoires, she tells us: "I do not remember ever having learned to read; I have heard that by the age of four, I had already acquired this ability, and that the task of teaching me to read had ended at that time, because from then on, the only question was seeing to it that I was not without books."[16] Some of these books came from the little library of one of her father's employees. While her mother was aware of this, she said nothing and, indeed, drew from the same well. One day, when someone informed her that her daughter was reading Candide, she simply told her to return it, without any remonstrations.[17] Here are the titles of the works read by Manon Philipon in her youth, given in the order she mentions them: the Ancien and Nouveau Testament, a Catéchisme, a Vie des Saints in two volumes, a French translation of Appien's On Civil Wars, a certain Théâtre de la Turquie en mauvais style, Scarron's Roman comique, the Mémoires de Pontis by Mlle. de Montpensier, an Art héraldique, Regnard's Voyages, Dacier's famous translation of Plutarch, the Epoux malheureux by Baculard d'Arnaud, Télémaque, Jerusalem Delivered in French, and Candide.[18] She was also made to read Fénelon's De l'Education des filles and, in French, Locke's On The Education of Children, "giving to the pupil what was meant to guide the teacher."[19] Later, at around the age of eighteen, she read haphazardly Condillac, Bossuet, Saint Jerome, Don Quixote,[20] and the philosophes, d'Holbach, Helvétius and Rousseau, the last named becoming her "breviary."[21]

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[15] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 66.

[16] Mémoires, vol. II, p. 9.

[17] Ibid., p. 24.

While this reading list contains much that is commendable, there are several items which could easily have been dispensed with, and much else that might have, indeed should have, been included. Mlle. Dillon, the future marquise de La Tour du Pin, tells of similar reading habits.[22] Such a diet may not have been, in all probability was not, shared by most of the upperclass girls who received their education at home, but the reading matter of many of them was certainly varied and rather curious.

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[18] Ibid., pp. 13-23.

[19] Ibid., p. 24.

[20] Ibid., p. 88.

[21] Lettres, vol. II, p. 28.

[22] Marquise de La Tour du Pin, Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans. Paris, 1907-1911, vol. I, p. 23.

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The craze for science, of which we have already spoken, found its way into the education of girls, not, to be sure, in the convents, but at home and in public courses. While the emphasis was mainly on the experimental sciences, the abstract sciences also benefited from this vogue. J.-N. Moreau noted in his journal: "I have just spent a half hour with the young countess de Chastellux, whose profound knowledge astonished me; this woman possesses geometry to the highest degree."[23] Ten years later, in 1785, Mlle. de Chastenay is found to be studying mathematics with M. Gilbert, her brother's teacher, who instructed them in elementary math, algebra, geometry and the theory of spheres.[24]

But it was mainly physics, chemistry, anatomy and natural history which benefited from the fad. Science had become modish, had become a mundane divertissement; people began to assemble private natural history collections, a few of which became famous, and botanizing was a favorite pastime of both young and old. To teach his two daughters natural history, "M. de Monthulé, while taking walks with them, would arouse their curiosity about trees and plants, and he had them make a sort of herbarium in which the nature, the properties and the uses of flora were brought out."[25]

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[23] Mes Souvenirs (1717-1797). Paris, 1901, vol. II, p. 213, note.

[24] Mémoires, vol. I, p. 38.

[25] Op. cit., vol. II, p. 202.

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[23] Mes Souvenirs (1717-1797). Paris, 1901, vol. II, p. 213, note.

[24] Mémoires, vol. I, p. 38.

[25] Op. cit., vol. II, p. 202.

The enthusiasm for the experimental sciences is also attested to by their invasion of the magazines of the times; side by side with articles on literature, one finds articles on natural history, on physics and on medicine. And this enthusiasm reflected itself in the education of women; Diderot, for example, had his daughter take a course in anatomy, in which the parts of the body were reproduced in wax.[26] It was mainly such courses, public or private, which enjoyed the favor of the elite; and while they were attended by both men and women, they attracted mostly women. In 1771, the duke de Croÿ arranged for a private course "in experimental physics, which my son urged our womenfolk to take, and which was quite well attended. M. Delor, an excellent former professor's assistant, gave it, bringing his instruments to our home, except for the final lessons, which were given in his own home. My son and his wife, Mmes de Tourzel, de Vérac and de Saint-Simon attended it quite assiduously."[27] In 1783, Mme de Sabran took a course in general science,[28] and around 1782, after her marriage, Mme Roland attended a course in botany given by Jussieu in the Jardin du Roi.[29] The fashion had even spread to the provinces, where, in a little town, Mlle. Dillon witnessed chemistry experiments conducted in the apothecary shop of the vicinity.[30] Following her marriage, in 1786, she went faithfully, three times a week, to the experimental physics laboratory in Montpellier.[31] Public courses became such a rage that one satirical writer of the period, addressing himself to women and girls, advised: "And make certain, especially, that you be seen at the public courses in chemistry, astronomy and geometry."[32] Another dissenting voice, that of Mme de Genlis, stated bluntly: "You learn nothing there, but you do retain a few scientific words."[33]

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[26] Diderot, Sur l'Ecole des jeunes demoiselles. Nouvelle Revue, Sept. 15, 1883, pp. 246-249.

[27] Duc de Croÿ, Journal inédit (1718-1784). Paris, 1906-1907, vol. III, p. 10.

[28] Comtesse de Sabran, Correspondance inédite avec le chevalier de Boufflers (1778-1788). Paris, 1875, p. 5.

[29] Mémoires, vol. II, p. 232 and note.

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The so-called arts d'agrément remained popular throughout the century, both in convent and home education. Every girl, from an early age, took lessons in dancing and posture. At the Abbaye-aux-Bois, it was Dauberval and Philippe, both of the Opéra, who taught dancing,[34] and Manon Philipon's dancing instructor was a certain M. Mozon.[35] These examples can be multiplied many fold. Dancing, then as now, was an absolute social necessity for young people, especially those of the privileged classes.

Music, too, was learned by almost all girls. In 1777, at the age of six, Mlle. de Chastenay apparently knew music very well.[36] At eleven, when Hélène Massalska went from the blue class to the white class at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, she was able to sol-fa, to play the harpsichord a little and the harp a little.[37] This passion for music also manifested itself in families of more modest means. Manon Philipon had no fewer than four teachers: M. Cajon for singing, M. Mignard for the guitar, and M. Watrin and Père Collomb for different aspects of the viola.[38]

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[30] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 19.

[31] Ibid., p. 47.

[32] [Damours] , Lettres de Milady *** sur l'influence que les femmes pourraient avoir dans l'éducation des hommes. Paris, 1784, p. 129.

[33] Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour. Paris, 1818, vol. I, p. 33.

[34] Perey and Maugras, op. cit., p. 55.

[35] Mémoires, vol. II, p. 14.

The third *art d'agrément*, drawing, was also very popular. Hélène Massalska,[39] Manon Philipon,[40] Eléonore Dejean,[41] and most of the other girls encountered in the 18th century, received lessons in drawing. Marmontel describes an *après-diner* at the de Monthulé's: "Brushes in the hand of Mme de Monthulé, pencils in the hands of her daughters and their governess, and this occupation, enlivened by laughing remarks or by pleasant readings, served them as a recreation."[42]

The importance attached to the *arts d'agrément* in relation to other studies can be seen by the fact that at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, each class received three prizes for history and geography, and three for dancing, three for music and three for drawing.[43]

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[36] *Mémoires*, vol. I, p. 21.

[37] Perey and Maugras, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[38] *Mémoires*, vol. II, pp. 14, 15.

[39] Perey and Maugras, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[40] *Mémoires*, vol. II, passim.

[41] L. Perey, *Figures du temps passé*. Paris, 1900, pp. 234, 235.

[42] *Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 202.

[43] Perey and Maugras, *op. cit*, p. 54.

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The teachers who instructed the girls, either in the convents or at home, were almost exclusively men. One of the few lay women encountered was the drawing teacher who came to the Congrégation de Notre-Dame around 1765, and who was permitted to enter the cloister.[44] Hélène Massalska mentions two teachers at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, a M. Huard, who taught history, and a M. Charme, who taught writing.[45] It is very probable that those who came from the outside were all men; within the Abbaye-aux-Bois, the nuns themselves taught only natural history and botany.[46] At Pentemont, the violin teacher and the harpsichord teacher were both men. Such, then, was the practice in the convents, where courses were given by _maîtres à cachet_, that is, by teachers working for a fee.[47] The same holds true for girls educated at home. Manon Philipon, after 1766, in addition to her music teachers, took history and geography lessons from a M. Marchand.[48] Mlle. de Chastenay studied under M. Gilbert, a mathematics teachers, and Abbé Barême, who taught her history and Latin.[49] Almost all were men, and some quite well-known; women teachers played virtually no role in the education of the daughters of the well-to-do and the aristocracy, although, as we have seen, many of them taught at the elementary level, in the Little Schools and the Charity Schools.[50]

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[44] Mme Roland, _Mémoires_, vol. II, p. 41.

[45] Percy and Maugras, _op. cit._, p. 55 and p. 33.

[46] _Ibid._, p. 166.

[47] [Adam, N.], _Essai en forme de mémoire sur l'éducation de la Jeunesse_. Paris, 1787, p. 15.

[48] _Mémoires_, vol. II, p. 13.

[49] _Mémoires_, vol. I, pp. 38, 39.

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"A woman of intelligence and character, who possessed only a smattering of the things she had to forgo studying in depth, would still be a very rare person,"[51] wrote Mme d'Epinay in 1771. This admission by a contemporary has the ring of truth, for if girls acquired a certain skill in the arts d'agrément, their training in the more academic areas of study was no more than mediocre, and, by and large, they remained fairly ignorant. Only a very small number of women in the 18th century acquired a reputation for learning and culture, and confessions such as those of Mme d'Epinay and Mme Geoffrin[52] show that these women, better educated than most, had no illusions about knowledge.

Convent education, especially, was inferior, partly because it remained uninfluenced by the intellectual developments in the outside world, partly because it aimed at the average intelligence of spoiled and snobbish young ladies who probably had no real interest in learning. On the other hand, girls who were educated at home, and who were intelligent, were able to take advantage of the enthusiasm for learning, which was one of the dominant traits of the century. Despite its worldly and superficial aspects, this enthusiasm was real and bore fruit. Women of exceptional intelligence, such as Manon Philipon, found, in the world in which they lived, possibilities for acquiring knowledge which would not have been available to them in former times. Such women, despite their teachers, despite their lessons, were largely self-taught, working alone or themselves choosing their teachers and their readings. If the majority of upper class women of the 18th century remained more or less ignorant, those who had a real interest in learning were able to satisfy it. Thespirit of the times was favorable to the intelligent and the intellectually curious.

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[50] Supra, Chapters I and II.

[51] Abbé Galiani, Correspondance. Paris, 1881, vol. I, p. 205.

[52] Supra, p. 84.

PART II

PROPOSALS

Opinions, Theories and Plans Pertaining to
the Education of Women from Fénelon's
De l'Education des filles (1687)
to Condorcet's *Mémoires sur
l'instruction publique*
(1791-1792).

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE AND ROLE OF WOMEN

When one thinks of women, of their nature and their role in society, it is impossible not to ask oneself the question, old as the world, often debated and answered variously according to one' s sex, one's age and one's temperament: is woman the equal of man? No, the men of olden times had decreed, and their physical strength made reasoned argument unnecessary. Perhaps, they then began to answer. And now, finally, the perhaps has become a hesitant yes.

This subject was much discussed in the closing centuries of the _ancien régime_. An entirely hypothetical discussion, however, for it was generally recognized that, even if they were inferior to men, women nevertheless -- and precisely because of their woman-ness -- often had the advantage over men. "Your looks have more power than our laws," [1] wrote Lord Halifax. And one of the shriller female voices of the century stated it thusly:

> Women are given nothing important to do, and yet they find themselves involved in everything. They have no rank, but they pass upon all ranks. They receive no honors, but they bestow honors on whomever they please. They have no employment, but they distribute employments. They occupy no positions of power yet they move the world at their will, and everyone pays homage

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[1] _Avis d'un père à sa fille_. (Translated by Mme Thiroux d'Arconville.) London, 1756, p. 33.

to them.[2]

The discussion is perhaps hypothetical, but it is nevertheless of considerable importance, for the kind of education given to women, or proposed for them, will depend in large measure on the prevailing attitude regarding their nature and their role in life.

During the first half of the 18th century, there were a number of writers who were firmly convinced of the inferiority of women, among them Abbé de Saint-Pierre,[3] who, in other respects, was so fertile in new and daring ideas, and Bocquel.[4] There were a few such anti-feminists, of course, in the second half of the century, and not only men, but, as has always been the case, women as well. Their number, however, had declined considerably, and it is impossible, moreover, to assign them to any particular group, whether the *philosophes*, the dilettantes, the clerics or the moralists. They were individual voices, speaking their own opinions, and not the representatives of some group or other. In 1756, Mme Thiroux d'Arconville translated a book by Lord Halifax which was favorable to men.[5] Rousseau, so adored by women, allows them only a subservient role, the role, indeed, of a slave:

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[2] [Mme de Coicy] , *Les Femmes comme il convient de les voir, ou Aperçu de ce que les femmes ont été, de ce qu'elles sont et de ce qu'elles pourraient être*. London and Paris, 1785, pp. 73, 74. The idea, moreover, was already banal even in the 18th century.

[3] *Projet pour perfectionner l'éducation des filles*. Paris, 1730. The work is very unfavorable to women.

[4] *Supériorité de l'homme sur la femme, ou l'inégalité des deux sexes*. Mss. in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 1744.

[5] *Op. cit.*

> Women's education must be entirely relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to raise them when they are young, to care for them when they are grown, to advise them, to console them, to make life pleasant and sweet for them -- such are the duties of women in all times, and that which must be taught them from their childhood on.[6]

And later, he states: "Women are made to give in to men and to bear even their injustice."[7] Diderot commiserates with the unhappy lot of women, but with no trace of indignation; he has little confidence in their minds.[8] Mme d'Epinay, who could lay claim to a certain superiority, does not believe women capable of significant intellectual accomplishment precisely because of their position in the world as women: "The most learned woman has not and cannot have but very superficial knowledge. What I am saying is that a woman is not in a position, by the very fact that she is a woman, to acquire sufficiently extensive knowledge to be useful to her fellow creatures, and it seems to me that this is the only kind of knowledge one can reasonably be proud of."[9] Mme de Genlis is roughly of the same opinion: "A woman has need of support. She can make herself esteemed only through the faultless practice of the more quiet virtues."[10]

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[6] Emile, ou de l'Education, in Oeuvres, ed., Petitain. Paris, 1852, vol. II, p. 637.

[7] Ibid., p. 661.

[8] Sur les femmes, in Oeuvres, ed. Assézat. Paris, 1875-77, vol. II, pp. 251-262.

[9] In a letter of 1771 to Abbé Galiani. Abbé Galiani, Correspondance. Paris, 1881, vol. I, pp. 203,204.

[10] Discours sur la suppression des couvents de religieuses et l'éducation publique des femmes. Paris, 1790, p. 26.

But little by little through the century, the cause of women found increasing support among the theoreticians, and beginning about 1750, new affirmations are encountered almost every day regarding the natural equality of the two sexes and their identical capabilities, or, at the very least, the harmonious equilibrium of different forces. Abbé Dinouart was a declared partisan of women.[11] M. de Puisieux stated peremptorily that "Nature has established a perfect equality between the two sexes,"[12] and logically concluded that women were therefore capable of holding public office and of going into teaching and medecine. Mlle. Archambault believes that "men have less difficulty than women in doing material things, and women less than men in everything that pertains to the mind."[13] They are defended by Père Caffiaux, for whom "the inequality of the sexes is a prejudice."[14] According to Boudier de Villemert, "many of them can stand comparison in regard to the mind, and most win out in regard to the heart."[15] Mme Riccoboni reminds her readers that "women are made to acquire knowledge and to be virtuous, which is the common lot of both sexes."[16] Voltaire is favorably disposed towards women.[17] Thomas, the academician heaps praise upon them in his famous Essai sur les femmes. "We shall perhaps see," he states in the preface, "that women are capable of fulfilling any position that religion, politics or government might wish to bestow upon them."[18] This thesis, of course, must have been extremely pleasing to his women readers. "However great the pride of man," wrote one of them, "he cannot conceal the fact that equality between him and woman was the very goal of Nature."[19] The book, needless to say, enjoyed a very great success.[20] Announcing its translation into Italian, the Esprit des Journaux lauds it in these terms: "Men can learn from it their duties toward women, and the latter, in addition to their duties toward men, can learn here their rights and their prerogatives as well."[21] Mme d'Ormoy proclaims: "We have everything necessary to be well-liked, to be strong and capable of the most subtle politics."[22] This is also the opinion of Riballier, who, in collaboration with Mlle. Cosson, wrote a work on the education of women[23] which an admirer has summarized thusly: "The father of this remarkable work proves triumphantly, not that *Madame* is the equal of *Monsieur*, but that *Monsieur* is the equal of *Madame*."[24] This same thesis is defended by Mme de Coicy[25] and Bachelier.[26] And in 1788, it is affirmed again by Condorcet in his *Lettres d'un bourgeois de New-Haven*.[27]

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[11] *Le Triomphe du sexe, ouvrage dans lequel on démontre que les femmes sont en tout égales aux hommes*. Amsterdam, 1749.

[12] *La Femme n'est pas inférieure à l'homme*. London, 1750, p. 19.

[13] *Dissertation sur la question: lequel, de l'homme ou de la femme, est le plus capable de constance? ou la Cause des dames soutenue par Mlle Archambault contre M*** et M.L.L.R.* Paris, 1750, p. 15.

[14] *Défenses du beau sexe, ou Mémoires historiques philosophiques et critiques pour servir d'apologie aux femmes*. Amsterdam, 1753, vol.I, p. 1.

[15] L'*Ami* des *femmes*, *ou la Philosophie du beau sexe*. Paris, 1774, p. 8. (First ed., 1758.) This work had two editions in 1758, two in 1759, and one in 1766, one in 1774, and a reprinting in 1788. The title caught on: in 1761, Graillard de Graville published *L'Ami des filles*, and Trigant another *Ami des femmes*, in 1771.

[16] *L'Abeille*, in *Recueil de pièces détachées*. Paris, 1765, p. 147.

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[17] Sur l'Education des filles, in Oeuvres, ed. Moland. Paris, 1877-1883, vol. XXIV, pp. 285-287.

[18] Essai sur le caractère, les moeurs et l'esprit des femmes dans les différents siècles. Paris, 1772, no page no.

[19] Letter to Thomas from an anonymous woman. Journal Encyclopédique, January, 1773, p. 111.

[20] Three editions in 1772 and 1773.

[21] April, 1783, pp. 385, 386.

[22] Les Malheurs de la jeune Emélie, pour servir d'instruction aux âmes vertueuses et sensibles. Paris, 1776, p. 142.

[23] De l'Education physique et morale des femmes, avec une notice alphabétique de celles qui se sont distinguées... Brussels and Paris, 1779.

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It can be seen, then, that from the beginning of the century to the end, and especially in the second half, the equality of the sexes was more and more upheld by the theoreticians. But it is apparent also that these theoreticians were simply making statements of principle, and were not, usually, calling for any radical reforms. Whether they belonged to one sex or the other, the partisans of women wanted only a little more freedom for them, and the moral satisfaction of not being considered inferior. In respect to these limited ambitions, it can be said that, by and large, they achieved their goals.

It is worth noting also that the *philosophes* did not openly take sides in this struggle for equality, a struggle which it would be somewhat premature to consider a full-scale feminist movement. Despite the article Femmes in the Encyclopédie (the quasi-official organ of the philosophes), in which the chevalier de Jaucourt concedes equality to women, at least in marriage,[28] the philosophes were not, as a group, warm supporters of their emancipation. While they no doubt did not wish to see women suppressed, neither were they willing to fight for their cause.

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[24] Letter to Fréron by an anonymous woman. *Année littéraire*, 1779, vol. II, p. 353.

[25] *Op. cit.*

[26] *Mémoire sur l'education des filles, présenté aux Etats-Généraux*. Paris, 1789.

[27] In Mazei, *Recherches historiques et politiques sur les Etats-Unis de l'Amerique septentrional*. Paris, 1789, vol. I, pp. 281- 287.

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What role did the women of the 18th century aspire to and what were the opinions of the writers in regard to their role? In the first half of the century, especially, women were generally looked upon as creatures whose sole function in life was to please. The result of this attitude was an artificial glitter, a factitious life which fashion imposed on upper-class women and which consumed so much of their time and energy that they had little left over, if they were married,[29] to devote to their duties as wives and mothers. Women who were not absorbed in the literary salons, that is to say, the great majority, were caught up in a mundane and frivolous life. According to Boudier de Villemert, reacting against this decadent existence, as did literally dozens of other moralists of the time, "What one calls a femme du bon ton, arises late in the morning, spends the rest of it at her toilette, while receiving visits in a state of deshabille sometimes more than daring. After lunch, one goes through the toilette again for the theater and the promenade; from there, one goes to shine at a dinner, from which one returns home very late in order to repeat the same useful life again the next day."[30] And Ranto de Laborie summarizes the vacuousness of this life in a succinct phrase: "It seems to me that the day of such ladies can be divided into four parts: the deshabille, the negligee, the toilette and the gaming house."[31] Along with such an existence, of course, went the notion that marital fidelity was ridiculous and that women had the right to offer their favors to any man whom they found attractive; and that men, for their part, had the right to seek such favors from any woman who happened to please them. Women had not yet begun to speak at this time of "living their own lives," but they nevertheless lived them. Love in marriage was considered laughable, and the moralists, with heavy irony, had a field day attacking this so-called *préjugé à la mode*. "A jealous husband," writes Chevrier, "is a monster even in the eyes of his virtuous wife."[32] "It has been six months since the sacraments united you," writes Abbé Coyer to a recently married woman, "and you still love your husband! Your dressmaker has the same weakness for hers, but *you*, you are a *Marquise*! How much longer do you intend to keep that air of reserve, so misplaced in marriage and excusable only in girls who are aspiring to that state? A gallant finds you beautiful, and you blush! Open your eyes! Here women blush only upon the application of rouge."[33] It can be concluded from these innumerable attacks that the lives of many women of the privileged classes were the very essence of frivolity, and worse.[34]

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[28] Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres. Mis en ordre et publié par M. Diderot, et, quant, à la partie mathématique, par M. d'Alembert. Paris, 1751-1780, vol. VI, pp. 471, 472.

[29] And if they were not married, they were either too young to participate in such a life, or they were in convents as nuns or lady residents.

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[30] *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

[31] *Lettres sur l'éducation des femmes et sur leur caractère en général*. Saint-Omer, 1757, pp. 27, 28.

[32] Le Quart d'heure d'une jolie femme, ou les Amusements de la toilette, ouvrage presque moral... Geneva, 1753, p. 12.

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Such was the fashion, among fashionable women, during the first half of the century; immorality or, at the very least, frivolity was in style. In the second half of the century, however, the fashion changed and virtuousness became the dominant style among the upper crust. This was the time when sensibility reigned supreme, a reaction no doubt to the harder, more masculine attitudes of the 17th century and the earlier part of the 18th. Women, to be in vogue, had to be sensitive and virtuous, or at least pretend to be; they had to weep tears of sorrow or joy, of compassion and esthetic ecstasy, at every possible opportunity. Beginning between about 1765 and 1770, the movement reached its apogee around the time of the Revolution, so that for a period of about twenty-five years, sensibility, sentimentality, the love of nature and a passion for simplicity dominated the thoughts and feelings of a large segment of the elite, modifying old ways of seeing. The idea of a wife freed from the bonds of marriage and the mother liberated from the care of her children was supplanted, in theory at least, by the idea of the loving wife and good mother. On the surface, and for awhile, woman was no longer a creature meant to please by her frivolity, but the companion of a husband and the mother of her children. Choderlos de Laclos, the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses, conveys this attitude in a letter to his wife:

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[33] In Bagatelles morales. Paris, 1755, pp. 228, 229.

[34] While this is no doubt true, it should be born in mind that human nature varies little from one century to the next and that the 18th was probably not much worse than any other in this respect. There were, of course, faithful wives and loving mothers, in the most remote towns of the provinces and in the most luxurious town houses of Paris, who knew no other ideal than that of raising their children properly and being good companions to their husbands.

> The greatest service you can render your daughter is to sprinkle her young soul with your expansive sensibility. The mind is what makes one shine, but feeling is what permits one to love and be loved; the one procures us only a little vainglory, the other renders us susceptible to the only true happiness we can enjoy in the short trip known as life: whatever its duration, one has lived only through the affection one has inspired or has felt.[35]

Undoubtedly, the way men conceived of women, and the conception women had of themselves, underwent a radical change during the course of the century.

What, however, in practice, did this new way of thinking and feeling produce? Did family and domestic virtues actually experience an improvement through its influence? From a perusal of diaries, memoirs, letters and journals of the period, it would appear that the latter part of the century had just about as many scandals as the earlier part. But conjugal and maternal love were at least professed, and fidelity to one's spouse, devotion to one's home and hearth were no longer made objects of ridicule. Thus, a kind of Victorian hypocrisy on the part of many, and a true attachment to the new values on the part of some. In 1774, Manon Philipon, raised in the new atmosphere and receptive to it, wrote to her friend Sophie Cannet:

> I can readily see myself engaged in the hard, innocent and useful labors of a woman totally occupied with her duties, cre-

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[35] Lettres inédites. Paris, 1904, p. 32.

> ating the happiness of a worthy husband, raising the fruit of our conjugal union with love, ardor and courage, making her home the repository of the highest principles, uniting under her dominion virtue and happiness, innocence and pleasure.[36]

This is quite a difference from the beginning of the century, especially under the Regency, when women were not in the habit of giving any more, indeed usually far less, than they received. And this young lady, who was so attracted to a sober, responsible family life, was one of the best educated of her generation.

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[36] Mme Roland, Nouvelles lettres, vol. I, p. 83.

CHAPTER II

THEORIES ON THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN

While the great majority of the 18th century theorists had some conception or other of woman's nature and her role in life, and were convinced that the "right" kind of education, according to their lights, would fit her for that role and develop her character in the proper direction, there were a few thinkers who, for various reasons, maintained that any education at all for women was completely futile, for they did not believe in its ultimate efficacy in the formation of character, or at least in the type of character they wanted to see formed. It would be well to dispose of such anti-education views at the outset.

Rousseau, for example, before his Emile, seems to have held such beliefs; Mme d'Epinay quotes him as saying:

> Mothers and fathers are not made to raise children, nor are children made to be raised... In the state of nature, there exist only needs which must be satisfied, and that under pain of dying of hunger; only enemies against whom one must defend oneself, and that under pain of being killed; only one's kind to reproduce, a thing to which pleasure invites us all too willingly, without the necessity of lessons from our parents. Thus, you see that the education of a savage is accomplished without help from anyone else, and that the basis of our education is not to be found in nature... We must begin by remaking all of society.[1]

All of which, of course, did not prevent Rousseau from publishing his Emile in 1762, with its carefully worked-out system of education.

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[1] Mme d'Epinay, Mémoires. Paris, 1865, vol. II, p. 276.

As for Mme d'Epinay herself, she did not seem to notice this contradiction, for in her Mémoires she notes that she wrote to Diderot, saying: "I was lacking in experience at that time; I still had all the illusions and enthusiasm that virtue produces in an honest soul; thus, I was repelled by that opinion. But now the veil has been ripped off. I'm sorry, but Jean-Jacques is right."[2] But in 1774, she herself wrote the Conversations d'Emilie, in which it was her intention "to show how wasted time, moments of idleness, can be employed by a vigilant mother to shape the mind of a child and inspire in her honest and virtuous sentiments,"[3] which implies a certain faith in the effectiveness of education. And as a matter of fact, Mme d'Epinay devoted much of her time to the education of her children and her grandchildren.

One of her good friends, Abbé Galiani, was also a sceptic in regard to the benefits of education. In a letter to Mme de Belsunce, Mme d'Epinay's daughter, he writes:

> You believe that there is something in education which is not what we call the result of chance; I agree, in part, and I say that life itself is a matter of chance, but that education is not completely so. There is a definite influence on us, which is the result of education. That is true. But do you know who the teacher is who educates us? The century and the nation to which we are born... Everything by which we are surrounded educates us, and teachers, as such, count for infinitely little and are scorned by good calculators. You are right, then, we must multiply the fortunate chances. You are right also in saying that we educate girls much more than we do boys, for a girl is less surrounded; but girls experience a natural crisis at the age of fifteen, which is a sort of regeneration,

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Les Conversations d'Emilie. Leipzig, 1774, p. iv.

> and, when her bosom begins to form, her education is completely obliterated.[4]

Such was the tone of high society at that time, before the outbreak of sensibility -- sceptical and given to paradoxes. It would be attaching too much importance to the good abbot's remarks to see anything more in them than the clever sallies of a materialistic and worldly cleric trying to impress a beautiful lady. It should be noted also that these three examples all come from the same little group, and that the first two disavowed their statements by their own works.

Later, in his first Essai sur l'education des femmes, Laclos took up Rousseau's thesis and set civilization in opposition to the state of nature. In a simple, perhaps simplistic, syllogism, he attempts to demonstrate the impossibility of educating women: "Wherever slavery exists, there can be no education. In every society, women are slaves. Therefore, social woman is not susceptible to education."[5] But this Essai was left incomplete, and in a third version he sets forth a whole program of studies;[6] the first was merely an intellectual game.

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Despite these witticisms and paradoxes, faith in the power of education held sway throughout the entire 18th century, which was, with the possible exception of the 20th, the century which produced the greatest and most spontaneous flowering of pedagogical theories and works.

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[4] Correspondance, vol. II, p. 185.

[5] De l'Education des femmes, Paris, 1903, p. 14.

[6] Troisième essai sur l'éducation des femmes, in the Revue bleue, 1908, vol. I, pp. 643-648.

Education had come into fashion, especially after the publication of *Emile*, and this new vogue was noted by writers of the period itself. "Most authors," wrote Caraccioli, "begin to make themselves known by some work on education. This is usually how one starts out."[7] The magazines of the times, which reviewed new books, as they do today, frequently remarked upon this phenomenal proliferation. "Works on education have been multiplying for some time."[8] "All the centuries combined will not produce as many works on education, whether intellectual or physical, general or specific, as the present century, which has been named *philosophic*, has given birth to."[9] The education of women, benefiting from this craze, came in for its share of attention, too. The provincial Academies, on several occasions, made it a subject for their prizes, for example, the *Académie des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts* of Besancon, in 1777 and 1778;[10] the *Académie* of Châlons-sur-Marne in 1783;[11] the *Académie* of Rouen in 1784.[12] In most cases, the authors of books on education devoted a part of them to the education of girls, and many such works dealt exclusively with girls. The education of women was also made the central theme of a number of works of fiction, and the subject was frequently dealt with in the more serious books of philosophers and moralists. Thus, the 18th century, and especially the second half of it, considered the education of women to be of vital importance, devoted a great amount of attention to it, and was intent on reforming it. As the Mercure de France stated: "The multitude of works that are published each day on the education of women and of men, the prizes that our Academies have been proposing these past few years on this excellent subject -- all seem to speak to our legislators of the necessity of a great reform in national education."[13]

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[7] *Dictionnaire critique*, etc. Lyons, 1768, p. 128.

[8] *Esprit des journaux*, June, 30, 1774, p. 180.

[9] *Journal encyclopédique*, August, 1781, p. 390.

[10] *Journal des Savants*, February, 1778, p. 122: "How might the education of women contribute to making men better?"

[11] H. Menu, *La Société littéraire de Châlons* (1750-1792), in *Mémoires de la Société d'agriculture de Châlons*. 1868, p. 189: "What would be the best education program for women?"

[12] *Journal encyclopédique*, October, 1783, p. 332: "The little care given to the instruction of women, destined by their present education to idleness and frivolous occupations, is this not the most immediate cause of the change in morality?"

For in France, at that time, there was almost universal agreement that educational practices, and especially in regard to the education of women, were poor. "As a rule," wrote Mme Riccoboni, "men receive an education and women educate themselves."[14] Throughout the century, without interruption, men of letters, moralists, philosophers, priests, dilettantes and women were constantly denouncing the frivolous, routine and selfish education which girls were receiving. The Journal Encyclopédique went as far as to indict mothers and fathers for "the criminal indolence in which they allowed their daughters to grow up."[15] The reasons given for this state of affairs differed, as well as the means proposed to remedy it. But there was virtual unanimity in regard to the ill, and the reprobation was general.[16]

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[13] June, 1779, p. 17.

[14] Op. cit., p. 147.

[15] April 15, 1773, p. 231.

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While no one seriously believed that all education for women would be futile, a considerable number of thinkers in 18th century France were of the opinion that women were either incapable of learning very much, or that if they acquired too much knowledge, it would pose a danger to the family and to society in general. There were thus those who were in favor of severely limiting what women should learn, basing their restrictions on preconceived notions of the nature of women or on the role they should play in society. Abbé Pluche, for example, would limit women's education to learning to count and to write letters, and to the study of history.[17] Boudier de Villemert, in certain respects so favorable to women, does not, however, encourage them to push their studies too far. "My answer is -- and I ask those women who read this to forgive me -- that, among all the subjects which exercise the prodigious activity of the human mind, there are only a few which fall within the competence of women. They must above all stay away from the abstract sciences and from thorny research, the details of which might burden their minds and dull that keenness in which they excel."[18] This is also, more or less, the sarcastic opinion of

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[16] A list of works containing this criticism would be too long to cite. The present writer has counted over thirty instances of it.

[17] _Le Spectacle de la nature_, etc. Paris, 1732-1750, vol. I, pp. 79-82.

[18] _Op. cit._, p. 32.

Rousseau: "Every learned maiden would remain a maiden all her life, if there were nothing but sensible men on earth."[19] Abbé Blanchard, after recommending the study of arithmetic and spelling, adds that "one can very well stop there."[20] Even among women themselves, there are some who object to too much learning. Writing to the empress of Russia in 1765, Mme Geoffrin told of her education:

> I was raised by an old grandmother who had a great deal of intelligence and sound judgement. She had had very little education, but her mind was so clear, so adroit, so active that it never failed her; it was always the equal of learning. She spoke so well about things she knew little of that no one would have wanted her to know them better; and when her ignorance was too obvious, she got out of it with jests, which would disconcert the pedants who had tried to humiliate her. She was so content with her lot that she looked upon knowledge as a very useless thing for a woman. She used to say, "I've gotten along so well without it, that I've never felt a need for it. If my granddaughter is a ninny, learning will only make her arrogant and intolerable; if she is intelligent and sensitive, she will do as I have done: she will make up for what she does not know by adroitness and feeling; and when she is older and more reasonable, she will find out what she has an aptitude for, and she will learn it quickly." When I was a child, therefore, she had me learn only to read, but she made me read a great deal; she taught me to think.[21]

Thus, Mme Geoffrin cannot be considered a strong partisan in the cause of women's education.

Abbé Galiani, despite his sophistical objections to any education at all for women, nevertheless makes some positive, though very limited, proposals: "You want to know what I think a woman should study. Her language, so that she may speak and write correctly; poetry, if she has a feeling for it. And in everything, she should always cultivate her imagination."[22] Mme Roland believed that women were "more useful to society by their virtues than by their knowledge."[23] Cerfvol, who was an advocat of divorce, did not want women to be too well-educated.[24] De Moissy, in a poem on education, recommends that women study history and geography, but without acquiring more than a superficial knowledge of them.[25]

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[19] Emile, in Oeuvres, vol. II, p. 670.

[20] Préceptes pour l'éducation des deux sexes. Lyons, 1803, vol. II, p. 299.

[21] D'Alembert, Eloge de Mme Geoffrin. Paris, 1812, p. 5.

Abbé Wandelaincourt believed that "the duration of their education must be shorter, less serious and less structured than the education of men; the study of the arts and sciences must be presented to them as a simple pastime and as a pleasant occupation."[26] Lezay-Marnésia is of the same opinion: "I believe that the sciences, far from being useful to women, will only harm them. If they left to men the vast and deep subjects, the strong and active virtues, their share would still be rather considerable."[27] "All the abstract sciences," Damour has a lady say, "do not fall within our competence, and they make us seem ridiculous."[28] Abbé Reyre holds the same view.[29]

Thus, a good many theorists believed that women should not be too well-educated, either because she is not capable, by her very nature, of assimilating very much knowledge, or because too much learning would be harmful to herself, to her family and to society.

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[22] _Correspondance_, vol. I, p. 207.

[23] _Nouvelles lettres_, vol. I, p. 12.

[24] _La Gamologie_, etc. Paris, 1772, p. 169.

[25] _Essai sur l'éducation_. Saint Petersberg, 1773, p. 49.

[26] Cited by _Journal encyclopédique_, July 15, 1782, p. 352.

[27] _Plan de lecture pour une jeune dame._ Paris, 1784, p. ix.

[28] _Lettres de milady *** sur l'influence que les femmes pourraient avoir dans l'education des hommes._ Paris, 1784, p. 129.

[29] _L'Ecole des jeunes demoiselles_, etc. Paris, 1786.

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But the education of women also had its strong defenders, who believed that women could and should learn more than they had been accustomed to learning; indeed, according to some theorists, could and should learn as much as men. The first important voice to call for a broader educational program for women was that of Fénelon, the 17th century prelate, whose *De l'Education des filles*, first published in 1687 in Paris, was widely read throughout the 18th century, exercising a profound influence on all those who wished to see an improvement in the education of women.

Among those who demanded that women be better educated were Voltaire,[30] Méhégan,[31] Rivard,[32] Nicholas de Fleury[33] and Mlle. d'Espinassy.[34] The object of Abbé de La Porte, in his *Histoire littéraire des femmes françaises*, was to "show what a woman can do in science when she is willing to place herself above the prejudice which forbids her to embellish her mind and to perfect her reason."[35] The *Journal Encyclopédique*, reviewing this work, adds that

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[30] *Epitre à Mme du Châtelet*, in Oeuvres, vol. III, pp. 374,375.

[31] *Lettre sur l'éducation des femmes*. Saint-Omer, 1757, p. 6.

[32] *Recueil de mémoires touchant l'éducation de la jeunesse*, etc. Paris, 1763, p. 387.

[33] *Essai sur les moyens de réformer l'éducation*, etc. Paris, 1764, pp. 105 ff.

[34] *Essai sur l'éducation des demoiselles*. Paris, 1764.

[35] Paris, 1769, vol. I, p.v.

> This interesting compilation was undertaken, no doubt, for the purpose of avenging women of the stupid barbarity of the prejudice which has only too long subsisted among us, and which seems to have condemned them to ignorance. It is for them and the glory of their talents in all the literary genres that a group of men of letters has erected this monument. In France, as everywhere else, it has long been thought that a career in science should be forbidden to women, who, destined, or rather condemned, to please uniquely by the charm of their faces, should neither aspire to the glory of poetic talent, nor gather the laurels of Parnassus, and even less descend into the depths of the abstract sciences.[36]

The same magazine, three years later, repeats essentially the same thought.[37] Still later, it praises Abbé Fromageot for "sufficiently instructing his pupils in everything it is important for them to know. He proves through examples that young ladies are able to share with men the glory of great undertakings and the merit of fine learning."[38] This same cause is supported by Mme de Chanterolle.[39] Abbé Le More, who was not very favorably disposed towards women, nevertheless wants them to have a good education, though he would not have them studying Greek, Latin, mathematics, poetry, modern languages or painting.[40]

D'Holbach, in a flowery style, argues that women will not lose their feminine qualities if they become better educated: "Let not this charming sex, made to spread pleasure and gentleness through life, have any fear of cultivating its mind; useful knowledge will in no way detract from its graces."[41] The right of women to a better education is also proclaimed by Riballier and Mlle. Cosson in their De l'Education physique et morale des femmes. "The authors," says the Journal Encyclopédique, "indignant about the abuse which seems to have condemned women to an idle and shameful ignorance, see in this the source of the evils which are bearing down upon and degrading the human species; one will perhaps find some slight exaggeration in these ideas."[42] For Mme de Miremont, women "should know enough to be able to understand everything, not be bored by anything, make an appropriate remark, and enjoy the knowledge of others, without being an admiring dupe."[43] The Esprit des Journaux would like to see them play a pedagogical role: "If women, naturally better endowed than men for work requiring patience rather than great learning, were to devote themselves more generally to cultivating the arts and sciences, they would be better able than we to produce elementary textbooks to facilitate the study of these subjects."[44] As for Laclos, he states that "elementary books in each of the sciences should be included in the library of any girl who wishes to be pleasing."[45] And: "It is no longer permissible for a woman who lays claim to being educated to write without purity and even without elegance."[46]

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[36] August 15, 1769, p. 30.

[37] February, 1772, pp. 438-445.

[38] April 15, 1773, p. 231.

[39] _Aspect philosophique_. Paris, 1772, p. 98.

[40] _Principes d'institution, ou la Manière d'élever les enfants des deux sexes_, etc. Paris, 1774, pp. 339-342.

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[41] La Morale universelle, etc. Amsterdam, 1776, vol. III, p. 134.

[42] April, 1779, pp. 16, 17.

[43] Traité de l'éducation des femmes, et Cours complet d'instruction. Paris, 1779-1789, vol. I, p. 145.

[44] June, 1782, p. 355.

[45] Troisième essai, p. 645.

[46] Ibid., p. 648.

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In a _Mémoire_ accompanying his famous _Rapport_,[47] Condorcet stated that "women have the same rights as men; they therefore have the right to obtain the same facilities for acquiring knowledge, which alone can provide them with the means really to exercise these rights with the same independence and to an equal extent."[48] This declaration, calling for the complete equality of rights for women and men, goes further than anything else in the 18th century. By demanding an equal education for women on the basis of her rights as a human being, rather than from some other consideration, it is clearly feminist in nature. But such a position is quite exceptional in the 18th century, and came, moreover, at the very end, during the Revolution. If other theorists favorable to women desired an equal education for them, or at least a better one, they did so for different reasons, mainly so that women would be better companions to their husbands. The argument, frequently repeated, went something like this: Husbands, sooner or later, find that their wives are not sufficiently educated to be good companions to them. They therefore consider them inferior, which leads inevitably to much marital strife. On the other hand, a well-educated and cultivated woman would understand her husband's work, would be able to help him if necessary, and would become his collaborator. "One of the important ways of pleasing," says Laclos, "is to speak to everyone in his own language. What drives many men of merit away from the company of women, and even desirable women, is the impossibility of talking to them, or even talking in their presence, about things in which they are interested. One sees only too often two people who are made to be together, a man of merit and a charming woman, regretfully go their separate ways, without any possibility of coming together again, for lack of a common language."[49] The same idea had already been expressed several years before by Riballier and Mlle. Cosson: "What a pleasure it will be for men when, in the course of their studies, they find in their wives companions who are familiar with Plato, Plutarch, Tacite, Newton, Buffon, Bossuet, Massilon and Montesquieu, who are capable of following them in their occupations, of reasoning, of philosophizing with them, of enlightening them perhaps, or at least inspiring them in their difficult researches."[50]

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[47] _Rapport et projet de décret sur l'organisation générale de l'instruction publique_, etc. Paris, 1883.

[48] _Mémoire sur l'éducation des femmes_, in _Rapport et projet_, p. 95.

In sum, the role of women was still to please, to charm, to shine, but by their education and their intelligence. In addition to being a good mother, she also had to be a good companion to her husband.

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After pointing out the deficiencies in the education of women, after demanding an improvement in their instruction, many of the authors fall silent and do not tell us what they think women should be taught. A few, however, do make positive suggestions and present programs of study, most of which consist merely of general guidelines. Each writer, in his own way (usually very unsystematic), indicates the subjects or books he considers useful, so that these programs of study are extremely varied and quite confused. While they can be applied to girls educated either in convents or at home, it is primarily to the latter that the authors address themselves, for almost all of them condemn convent education.

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[49] Essai sur l'éducation des femmes, p. 64.

[50] Op. cit., p. 63.

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It is generally agreed that girls should begin by learning properly the grammar and spelling of their own language, which, according to most of the theorists, women make such a hash of. "In England," writes Carpentier, "they would not allow a woman, especially one who was born something, get away, in a letter, with a misspelling ... In France, women are almost always superior to men in dictation, at least in their natural talent for it. And yet, unhappily, there are scarcely two in a thousand who are able to write correctly."[51]

In regard to the study of Latin, opinion was fairly evenly divided; Rivard, for example, was for it,[52] while Mme de Puisieux considered it useless.[53] The study of the literatures of Antiquity is recommended by almost no one but Laclos, who would like to see girls introduced in their early readings to the Greek and Roman philosophers, to Plutarch's famous men and to the literatures of Greece and Rome.[54] Abbé Blanchard will permit only the most intelligent to study fables and poetry.[55] But other thinkers concede more. Méhégan, for example, recommends philosophy, metaphysics and ethics,[56] weighty subjects which are also found in the programs of Abbé Fromageot[57] and Mme de Miremont.[58]

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[51] Nouveau plan d'éducation, etc. Paris, 1775, pp. lxx-lxxi.

[52] Op. cit., p. 388.

[53] Conseils à une ami. Paris, 1882, p. 14.

The study of history, which had still not gotten much beyond the chronological listing of important dates and events, was strongly advised by Abbé Blanchard[59] and Abbé Fromageot.[60] The latter, indeed, in his *Cours d'Etudes*, devotes five volumes to ancient history and two (the work was left incomplete) to modern history.[61] Mme de Miremont, for her part, makes do with four volumes of history in her *Traité d'Education*.[62] These two history manuals, both intended for girls, show how the subject was dealt with in the 18th century; they are, essentially, compilations of political and military facts, with no cultural or economic history and no attempt at interpretation.

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[54] *Troisième essai*, p. 645.

[55] *Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 300.

[56] *Op. cit.*, pp. 22, 23.

[57] *Cours d'étude des jeunes demoiselles*, etc. Paris, 1772-1775, vol. I, pp. xxvii ff.

[58] *Op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 340-502.

[59] *Op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 300, 301.

[60] *Op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 27 ff.

[61] *Ibid.*, vols. I through VIII.

[62] *Op. cit.*, vols. IV through VII.

The usefulness of modern languages is generally recognized and their study recommended. Mme de Puisieux, however, would limit them to princesses, who might be called upon to marry a foreigner; for lesser mortals, they were useless. "I would not hesitate to say, as M. de *** said to his wife, who was wracking her brains studying Spanish: 'See here, Madame, why don't you get yourself a good dancing master, who will teach you to walk properly and to present yourself graciously, and stop annoying me with your dozen Spanish words, which you will never learn to say well anyhow.' "[63] Laclos feels that "Italian is a language made for pleasure, English one for instruction."[64]

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While there is a wide variety of opinion regarding what girls should be taught in the area of the humanities, the theorists generally agree that they should take up the study of science, especially the two experimental sciences, physics and natural history. In 1731, Abbé Nollet was still able to write: "Mechanics, hydrostatics, optics are words which still frighten the ears; a lady would hardly dare to pronounce them without fearing to appear ridiculous."[65] But later in the century, this was no longer the case, and the study of science was frequently recommended for girls. In 1755, Méhégan includes physics and natural history in his program;[66] so too does Abbé Blanchard.[67] Boudier de Villemert feels that "physics and history, between them, can furnish women with an agreeable sort of study."[68] Abbé Fromageot promised to include in his incomplete Cours d'Etudes the basic principles of physics and natural history.[69] When Mme de Miremont was putting together her seven volume Traité de l'éducation des femmes, she found room to include not only physics and natural history, but physiology as well.[70] The program Laclos presents is even broader: "It seems to us necessary to have some knowledge in astronomy, in physics, in chemistry, in natural history and in botony. These names should not frighten anyone."[71] Mlle Le Masson Le Golft recommends the study of physics and anatomy.[72]

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[63] *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

[64] *Essai sur l'éducation des femmes*, p. 170.

[65] *Programme, ou Idée générale d'un cours de physique expérimentale*. Paris, 1731, p. xii.

The case is not the same for the abstract sciences. Mme de Miremont, to be sure, feels it necessary, in her Traité, to provide an explanation of terms used in geometry.[73] But in general, algebra and geometry are not spoken of, and only the natural sciences are recommended to girls for their study.

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[66] Op. cit., p. 22.

[67] Op. cit., vol. II, pp. 312, 313.

[68] Op. cit., p. 34.

[69] Op. cit., vol. I, pp. xxvii ff.

[70] Op. cit., vol. III and vol. II, pp. 107-340.

[71] Troisième essai, p. 647.

[72] Lettres relatives de l'éducation. Paris, 1788, pp. 32 ff.

[73] Op. cit., vol. III, pp. 5-16.

The theorists agree also that too much attention was given to the _arts d'agrément_. Considering them to be of little use in adulthood, they feel that they take up too much time in the early years, time which could be more profitably employed. Mme d'Epinay, at the age of forty-five, wrote to Abbé Galiani: "I am very ignorant, there's the truth. My whole education was directed towards the agreeable talents, and now I can no longer make use of them. There is left to me only some scanty knowledge of those arts."[74] She believes, moreover, that even if women were to persevere in such arts as painting, sculpture and architecture, they would never be able to excel in them.[75] Riballier and Mlle. Cosson wax indignant over the fact that "the education of girls is considered finished as soon as one has succeeded in imparting to them a few futile talents."[76] Others, including Voltaire,[77] believe that the study of the _arts d'agrément_ is synonomous with the study of ways to please, that is, with frivolity and immorality. In general, it can be said that while some theorists condemned the _arts d'agrément_ outright, most wished to see them continued, but with less emphasis placed upon them.

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The writers who were most strongly in favor of better education for women were often the very ones who warned them about the perils of trying to be a femme savante or a wit, the usual consequence of which was to make oneself appear ridiculous. Mme d'Epinay states that "a woman is very wrong, and only makes herself ridiculous, when she flaunts herself as learned or as a wit, and when she believes herself capable of maintaining such a reputation; but she is nevertheless very right to acquire as much learning as she is able to."[78] In 1774, an editor of the Année littéraire, reviewing a new edition of Thomas's Essai sur les femmes, declares poetically: "The cap of the doctor does not sit well on the head of the Graces; a few flowers, a garland of roses suffice to adorn their brow."[79] Women, too, though writers themselves, are critical of other women authors and of female wits. Mme de Miremont says that a woman "must not appear to be either learned, political or a wit, for she would make herself ridiculous."[80] This is also the opinion of Mme de Monbart.[81] Even Laclos, whose views on women's education are so liberal, hopes that women will have "a good enough mind never to display their knowledge except to their most intimate friends, and so to speak, in confidence."[82] Thus, while the 18th century, on the whole, strongly favored an improvement in women's education, and advanced numerous proposals to this effect, it joined with previous centuries in a general condemnation of female wits and femmes savantes.

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[74] _Correspondance_, vol. I, p. 203.

[75] _Ibid._, vol. I, p. 104.

[76] _Op. cit._, p. 53.

[77] _Dictionnaire philosophique_, under the word "Adultère," in _Oeuvres_, vol. XVII, p. 73.

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[78] Abbé Galiani, Correspondance, vol. I, p. 204.

[79] 1774, vol. IV, p. 169.

[80] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 145.

[81] Sophie, ou l'Education des filles. Berlin, 1777, p. 68.

[82] Troisième essai, p. 648.

CONCLUSIONS

While the education of women in 18th century France no doubt left much to be desired, it has been seen that it was perhaps better and more widespread than might have been assumed. A considerable proportion of the girls of the non-privileged classes did at least receive an elementary education, learning to read, write, do simple arithmetic and acquire those manual skills, especially needlework, which would be most useful to them in the lives for which they were ultimately destined. There was also a strong emphasis on instruction in civility, or manners, and, as might be expected, in religion. The Little Schools, where many of the daughters of farmers and working-class families received their education, were usually supported by local taxation and sometimes by private endowments, though in almost all cases the pupils were required to pay small fees as well. While public and almost universal (most towns and villages could boast of their Little School), elementary education cannot be said to have been entirely free. (The Charity Schools, however, run by nuns and especially intended for impoverished girls, did offer free instruction.) The Little Schools were usually staffed by laymen or laywomen, more or less carefully chosen by community and church officials, and governed in their conduct by diocesan regulations. Standards in the

Little Schools thus varied from town to town and region to region. While there existed formal prohibitions against boys and girls attending the same classes, and even against girls being taught by male teachers, such prohibitions seem to have been largely ignored, and girls and boys usually sat in the same classrooms together, where they were instructed by male teachers. Often, however, the wife of the local teacher or a pious spinster would conduct separate classes for girls. Formal education beyond the elementary level for girls of the non-privileged classes was unheard of in 18th century France.

The daughters of the wealthy bourgeoisie and the aristocracy usually received their education in convents which they entered at about the age of six or seven and which they left at between sixteen and twenty in order to marry. Each convent catered to a particular social group, and the nuns at any given convent came, by and large, from the same milieu and the same class as the students. The most fashionable convents were located in Paris, but a few in the provinces attracted girls of the highest nobility or from the wealthiest bourgeois families. Compared to present-day standards, convent education in the 18th century was distinctly inferior. Far too much time was devoted to instruction in religion, to rote learning and to lessons in dancing, music and drawing; far too little to the more academic subjects: women who had been educated at convents were noted for their poor command of written French.

Students in the convents, as in the Little Schools, were also instructed in certain manual skills; they were required, moreover, to participate in the housekeeping and management chores of the convent, thus preparing them for the domestic life they would later lead. Nuns played little part in the actual teaching of subjects, acting mainly as monitors and coaches; the teachers who gave the courses usually came from the outside and were almost always men. Convent education despite its limited intellectual content (or perhaps partly because of it), can be said to have been "realistic," in that it prepared the girls of the upper classes for the kind of life they would eventually lead.

As the century progressed, convent education came in for ever greater criticism, and more and more families therefore began to educate their daughters at home, using private tutors. While home education appears in general to have been superior to convent education, especially in regard to intellectual achievement, the available evidence indicates that it suffered from lack of structure, the girls reading haphazardly a fairly wide variety of works, some important and useful, others trivial or obscure.

In regard to educational theory, there was a huge proliferation of works in this area in 18th century France, especially during the second half of the century. The one thing on which there was virtual unanimity of opinion was the poor quality of woman's education and the necessity for improving it. A second thing on which almost all the theorists agreed, implicitly or explicitly, was that no proposals in regard to woman's education could be put forth without first reaching some understanding about her nature and her role in society, on which subject widely divergent views were expressed, ranging from extremes of feminist sentiment to the opposite extreme of anti-feminism. While this dichotomy of opinion continued to exist throughout the century, the anti-feminists, on the whole, grew more and more subdued as the century progressed, terminating in an appeal for complete equality between the sexes by the time of the Revolution. Educational proposals were extremely varied and quite unsystematic; in general, it can be said, however, that the more feminist the theoretician, the more he or she favored a greater emphasis on intellectual attainment in the education of women; on the other hand, the more anti-feminist the writer, the more he or she (and there were, indeed, anti-feminist women) favored a rudimentary education consisting of not much more than the three R's, with perhaps some smattering of natural history or botany. On the whole, however, the century, with its deep commitment to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, was favorable to the cause of women, and during the Revolutionary period an important member of the legislative assembly could go so far as to call for complete educational equality for women, based not on the idea that, better educated, they would be better companions to their husbands, but rather on the natural rights of women as equal members of the human race.

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A NOTE ON THE QUOTATIONS

All quotations appearing in this report, with the exception of H. C. Barnard's The French Tradition in Education, which was read in English, were translated by me from the French; the blame for whatever inaccuracies in meaning or infelicities of style they may contain cannot, therefore, be placed on anyone else. While a few of the works quoted from have previously been translated into English, the great majority, including the de Luppé book, have never enjoyed that somewhat dubious distinction, so that almost all the quotations in the present study are given here in English for the first time.

In one or two instances, notably the rather lengthy passage on pages ten and eleven, I chose to leave the quotation in French so that the reader might savor the warmth and charm of the original, the full effect of which would have been at least partly lost in translation.

Apart from any other merit this report might have, I hope that by presenting in English the numerous quotations contained herein, most of which were culled from works which are unavailable in the United States, I have rendered a useful service to all those who are interested in the history of education.